THE WRITER AND THE COMMISSAR

George Paloczi-Horvath

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Can authors obey orders? Can poets toe the party line? Can literature become a cog in the political machine? This book, based solely on Communist sources, is the first attempt to answer these and other questions about the situation of writers in Communist countries.
It gives a general survey of the fate of literature in the Sino-Soviet world over the years. It shows for example how the Pasternak affair, reported as an isolated incident in the West, was simply one of many instances in the general pattern of inevitable conflict between the Commissar and the creative artists.

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A BACKGROUND BOOK

George Paloczi-Horvath

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The principle of Party literature consists in the fact that not only may literature not be an instrument of gain for individuals or groups, but also in that it may not be an individual matter at all. . . . Down with non-Party writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become . . . a wheel and a screw of the single great (Party) mechanism.—*Lenin: The Party Organisation and Party Literature, 1905.*

But none of this would have happened if a couple of writers had been shot in time.—*Khrushchev on the Hungarian Revolution, 1957.*

1
The Writer and the Commissar

A POET, Napoleon said, is a man, undoubtedly gifted, who has learned to make verses as a soldier does exercises, and he must obey orders. Bonaparte did not expect his poets to obey orders all the time, nor did he wish to interfere with their style. He only expected that in some of their important work they should help to make Frenchmen ardent patriots and to 'assure the prestige' of the fatherland.

The most consistent and systematic attempts to force writers into obedience have been and are being made by the Communist régimes of the twentieth century. The gigantic experiment of regimenting literature has so far proved an utter failure, even if we base our verdict exclusively on Communist sources (as this essay does).

The poet cannot obey orders, even if he wants to. The poet (or any other creative writer) cannot obey orders, however ardently he has espoused a cause. He cannot obey orders even if he is as enthusiastic a literary trooper as Napoleon expected his soldiers to be.

In studying this experiment one is confronted with a tragedy, the principal parties in which are compelled to clash with each other, whether they like it or not. The tragedy might be called 'The Writer and the Commissar'. They clash even if both of them are at the outset sincere in their convictions.

Artists and writers are necessary evils in Communist régimes. According to Communist dogma, a society guided by Marxism-Leninism is the most highly developed of all possible social forms, hence it must lead also in the realms of literature and the arts. Yet the artists and writers produce unbearably drab propaganda under repression.

while even a little artistic freedom turns them into mouthpieces of resentment and opposition. All Communist régimes whose record in this respect will be studied in these pages have been and are compelled to alternate between repression and relaxation, between pampering and executing the writers and the artists.

* * *

The more than forty years' history of literature in Russia, the Ukraine and the Asiatic Soviet republics, in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia since 1944, in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Roumania, Bulgaria and Albania since 1945, and lately in China, North Vietnam and North Korea since 1949–50, provides sufficient material for the study of this question. Only such facts and statements based solely on Communist documents as have been publicly uttered and transmitted by government-controlled radios, or printed in one of the countries of the Sino-Soviet orbit, have been accepted in these pages.

No one has yet compiled a list of the writers executed in the Communist world, but their number runs into thousands, even according to official reports. Those writers who have served or are serving prison sentences run into tens of thousands. The list of banned literary and artistic periodicals in the orbit is a very long one. The number of blacklisted writers and artists again runs into thousands. And the Soviet writers whose works have been ferociously attacked by party bureaucrats—the Pilnyacks, Zoshchenkos, Akhmatovas, Dudintsevs and Pasternaks—have their opposite numbers in every country under Communist rule.

There is no country in the Communist orbit from Lithuania and Latvia to China and North Korea in which the Party Central Committee has not had to rebuke groups of writers as 'slanderers of [Soviet or Chinese or Bulgarian or Polish] reality', as 'malicious fault-finders', as 'anti-Party individualists' or even as 'enemies of the people'.

Before embarking on a short survey of the writer's fate in the various countries of the Communist world, it is

necessary to take a quick look at the basic contradictions between creative writing and the Communist system.

The contradiction between individual literary talent and the Party monolith is quite obvious. The Party insists on complete control over literature. It insists on tendentiousness; it avowedly abhors individual genius and insists on conformity of form and content. Thus Communist dictatorship and literature are fundamentally contradictory. The writer and the commissar are enemies because of their very nature.

In Communist Party life language is an important and precise instrument—and an extremely dangerous one. At the same time, language has a ceremonial role and it must be used according to the proper ritual. To write down or utter an 'incorrect expression' in Party speeches or Party writing is fraught with great peril. The slightest deviation from the officially approved, and therefore obligatory, formulae is very rare. Change of formulation is generally reserved to the supreme leader (the 'keeper of the dogma', Stalin or Khrushchev or Mao) or to the leaders of the various economic, cultural and other 'fronts'. For an 'erroneous phrase' Party functionaries have nowadays to exercise prompt self-criticism; in the Stalin era they were usually liquidated.

For the commissar, the slightest verbal change in a basic formula or ceremonial expression has a supreme importance. The actual situation of power within the top leadership can be fathomed from these slight changes. And the success, even the life of the commissar (wherever he may be placed on the hierarchical ladder), largely depends on his ability to fathom these changes. The commissar fears and respects formulae.

The slogans and ceremonial expressions change with the Party line. The commissar is so conditioned during his dangerous climb upwards in Party hierarchy that any event or problem of private or public life is automatically associated with one of the *current* Party slogans or Marxist-Leninist quotations. So he simply repeats the appropriate one. And as an old Muscovite saying has it: 'On the whole everything is forbidden, but anything permitted is obligatory.' So, when the commissar is permitted

or expected to say something, he always *knows* what to say, to the exact wording. He knows that deviation from *Pravda*-language entails dangers not only for those who utter such a statement but also for those *who listen to it without protest.*

The writer irritates and infuriates the commissar by his verbal libertinism, by his experimental attitude—trying to say things differently. In the commissar's eyes, the writer is an irreverent and irresponsible verbal manipulator.

The commissar is the high priest. He firmly believes that in Party life and in public life no one should have individual prestige and popularity with the exception of the supreme leader or leaders. Prestige and popularity are made and broken by the Party. Everything has to be decided at the various Party headquarters. But writers, by the very nature of their calling, build up individual prestige; they can achieve tremendous popularity, quite independently of Party decisions. Individual talent cannot be apportioned, distributed and controlled by the Party and its commissars. Hence its infinite dangers.

The commissar expects the writer to take part in the day-by-day political struggle of the Party. 'Nobody and nothing can stand outside politics.' But even here there is a verbal barrier. By politically 'engaged' writing, the commissar means a *literature which is one of the propaganda weapons in furthering the Party line of the day.* The commissar praises Dickens as an 'engaged' writer for exposing the miseries and injustices which he saw in his country, but woe to the writer who dares to do the same today in one of the Communist countries. The writer revolts in most cases against the commissar because he would like to make common cause with the poor tormented peoples of the Communist lands, but when he does so he is persecuted as a vicious slanderer of Communist construction.

The commissar prefers, the writer abhors, regimented mediocrity. According to the commissar the social whole is more important than its individual components. The writer feels that the happiness and well-being of human society can be measured only by the happiness and well-

being of people as individuals. The writer believes with Pasternak that 'man was born to live and not prepare to live'. The commissar believes that there cannot be truth or beauty independent of the present aims of the Party. The commissar wants the writer to mould human beings into unquestioning subjects; the writer wants to find out about human beings.

The writer and the commissar can never be at peace.

The Communist Party was, is and will be the only ruler of thoughts, the mouthpiece of ideas and aspirations, the leader and organiser of the people throughout its struggle for Communism.—*'Pravda', July 6, 1956.*

Individualism is the most evil enemy of creative freedom. —*'Pravda', April 4, 1957.*

The Party is relentlessly combating the infiltration into literature and art of any influences of an alien ideology. . . . Our ideological weapon must be in good order and must act unfailingly.—*Khrushchev in 1957 to the Soviet Writers' Union.*

Where cult of personality is present, scientific thought must give way to blind faith, creativity to dogma, public opinion to caprice. The deity must have worshippers and servility. . . . Artistic creativity is inseparable from social initiative, from experimentation. . . . When one man owns the truth, artists are relegated to the role of illustrators and ode-singers.—*Alexander Kron in 'Literaturnaya Moskva', II, 1957.*

2
The Experiment in the Soviet Union

THE history of Soviet literature since the revolution can be divided into four main periods. The first, from 1917 till about 1930, offered writers some freedom for experimentation, for individual style, for literary exploration. About 1930 the full blast of the Stalin era hit the writers, introducing the second period, that of the Stalin dictatorship. Stalin's death in 1953 inaugurated the brief third period, that of the 'thaw', while the years 1958–59 seem to initiate a stage of transition towards the full dictatorship of Khrushchev. The second period, lasting more than two decades, was the drabbest era of Russian literature. The best literary works of the Soviet Union were published in the relatively freer first and third periods. Within these periods there were many shorter and longer 'freezes' and 'thaws' of the literary climate.

* * *

The Soviet system is, of course, the pattern forced on all countries under Communist rule. The writers of these countries have experienced roughly the same development as those of Russia, with the difference that four decades of Soviet experience has been compressed in their countries into a single decade. Hence the more violent reactions.

Immediately after the revolution many Russian writers were sincere Communists. We would call them today idealistic or romantic Communists, or more precisely 'within-the-Party-fellow-travellers'.

The idea that the writer is a soldier fighting on the 'literary front' for the global victory of Communism was enthusiastically accepted by a great many groups of Left-

ish writers. After the victory of the Bolshevik revolution many of those writers who were later executed, silenced or driven to suicide accepted the Lelevich* thesis: 'The main purpose of art is to infect the reader with the ideology of the ruling class', i.e. with the Marxist ideology of the Bolsheviks.

The Bolshevik Party was at that time, however, not the monolith into which Stalin was later to transform it. It was still a Party of factions and debates. Hence there were also many literary groups within and around the party—all of which declared their militancy, all wanting to establish the cultural dictatorship of the proletariat. 'Having gained political power, we should conquer and rule in the realm of culture' (Averbakh*).

In the hectic atmosphere of the time many a 'modern' poet, symbolist writer or expressionist playwright felt that his place was in one of the militant groups of writers. These groups were either called 'associations of proletarian writers' or they chose names stressing their militancy and revolutionary spirit. The 'At-the-Post Group', later called 'At-the-Literary-Post', held *'that the Party must without fail rule literature'*. In Moscow, writers of working-class origin called their group the 'Forge' and declared that 'proletarian art is the prism in which the personality of a class is concentrated'. There was the 'October' group of Averbakh and Libedinski, and many regional groups. The 'futurist' poets also joined the revolution and later organised their LEF (Left Front of Writers). Their leader, the poet Vladimir Mayokovsky, launched the slogan 'Futurism at the service of the revolution', and wrote in 1918 his 'Decree to the Army of Art', which starts:

> *He alone is a Communist true*
> *who burns the bridge for retreat.*
> *Stop marching slowly, Futurists,*
> *into the future . . . leap!*

Most of the literary groups had their own periodicals and their representatives in the various publishing ventures. They had their contacts in Party and Government

* Lelevich and Averbakh were also executed later as deviationists.

offices of which some of their members were themselves officials. The most important Government department, from the writers' point of view, was (and still is) GLAVLIT, the Chief Administration for Literary Affairs, responsible for censorship and publishing. This was and is controlled by AGITPROP, the agitation and propaganda department of the Party.

It was inherent in the system which the revolution built up that the writers were increasingly dependent on the commissars. In the period preceding full dictatorship, the Communist writers tried to convince the commissars that their group or school or particular 'ism' could best serve the Party. The commissars in general made no attempt to interfere as yet with style, so long as the content was not inimical to the régime. Rival groups were more dangerous to writers than the commissars, especially if such rivals had better connections with the Secret Police.

The 'literary front' was in confusion. Some well-known writers who accepted the revolution turned against some of its direst consequences, like the imaginist poet, Yesenin. Yuri Olesha, a convinced revolutionary, stuck to his belief that there always would be a conflict between the individual and the collective. Isaac Babel went on writing about the civil war period, trying to give a true picture of it, with all its horrors, instead of writing exhortative works on the theme of industrial progress. Blok and Mayakovsky, although accepting the revolution, were heretics in style.

The trouble was that no one could tell who was a heretic and who was not. Although Marxism was regarded as a super-science and an infallible method for analysing any and every question and for finding the correct answers, it failed utterly to give answers to literary problems. It turned out that there is no such thing as Marxist aesthetics. The Party, or at least certain leaders of the Party, experimented for some years with PROLETCULT. Proletarian culture was supposed to be built up by training workers to 'write from scratch'. The first requisite, then, for Communist writing was pure working-class origin. Although this experiment was abandoned,

the determination remained that in time artists and writers (and scientists) should not come from 'class-hostile' families.

It took a long time to decide that both proletarian and non-proletarian writers should be united in a broad association and they should only promise 'to support the platform of the Soviet power and strive to participate in Socialist construction'.

In the mid-twenties, however, the Party had not yet been transformed by Stalin into the apparatus of total terrorism. Some poets were still enthusiastic. Mayakovsky wrote in 1926: 'I want the pen to be put on the same footing with the bayonet. I want Stalin, in the name of the Politbureau, to present reports on the production of verse along with reports on pig iron and steel.'

* * *

The first Five Year Plan was now being prepared. Soon the slogans were given out 'to arm the people ideologically for the overfulfilment of the Plan' and to 'overtake and surpass the classics'.

In 1928, at the outset of the Plan, the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) emerged as the strongest group, having the most direct Party backing. Its leaders, Averbakh, Fadeyev and Panfyorov, had been for some years defending the writers against 'the scandalous and harsh methods . . . of literary struggle' which had by the mid-twenties silenced entire groups of writers, killed periodicals, stopped the publication of novels and driven poets to suicide, for instance the imagist poet Yesenin.

But by the end of the twenties Stalin had completed his murderous apparatus of bureaucratic despotism, the purges were starting and Averbakh and Fadeyev were attacked by the Party for 'fighting only against Left-extremism and forgetting about the struggle against Right-deviationism'. They were soon turned into literary commissars of a sort and became leaders of 'the class-war on the literary front'. Hundreds of novels were banned, often at the galley-proof stage. Even such writers as Vsevolod Ivanov and Isaac Babel were forbidden to publish their latest work. Boris Pilnyak, the great novelist, was

forced to make changes in his recently finished novel; Bulgakov was completely silenced; Furmanov and Sholokhov were severely attacked.

In 1929 Pilnyak and the Leningrad writer Zamyatin were denounced by the RAPP as 'counter-revolutionaries full of pernicious petty-bourgeois Trotskyist tendencies'. Zamyatin went into exile; Pilnyak was executed.

Literature being regarded as an integral part of political life, hundreds of writers were liquidated in the purges of the thirties. Many of the leaders of the literary revolution became 'unpersons', their works in stock were pulped and their works in the libraries transferred to the closed sections.

By 1930 the RAPP had completely monopolised Soviet literary life. After they had been denounced by RAPP, the authorities banned two plays by Vladimir Mayakovsky, 'the poet of the revolution' (*Bedbug* in 1928 and *Bath-house* in 1930). Moreover, Mayakovsky was forced like many other writers to join the RAPP in self-defence. He first came to their meeting in February 1930 and declared: 'Our opinions differ. You know me, I know you. I am joining you because I know that outside your organisation I cannot work any more.'

The RAPP leaders went on attacking Mayakovksy for his 'insufficient closeness to and concern for the masses'. On March 25, Mayakovsky gave a public reading of a new poem in which he wrote:

I'm fed
to the teeth
with agit-prop
I'd like
to scribble for you
love ballads—
they're charming
and pay quite a lot.

But I
mastered myself,
and crushed under foot
the throat
of my very own songs.

On April 14 he shot himself. This un-Bolshevik action was severely criticised and for a while his works were not published and his name was removed from the school curricula. Today he is again regarded as 'the poet of the revolution'.

At the 1930 Bolshevik Party congress it was laid down that: 'In a moment of sharpened class-struggle any liberalism, any respect for aesthetic language . . . is direct aid to the enemy.'

* * *

There ensued the long period during which adverse criticism usually led to arrest and imprisonment as criticism amounted to official denunciation. Western publishers look for 'quotes' in the reviews their authors get, a 'quote' being a short, quotable eulogy of the work in question. The Soviet Security Police (whether it was called CHEKA, OGPU, NKVD, or MVD) did not have to look for quotes. When a writer was branded as a 'bourgeois individualist lost in the morass of psychologisation', or 'a slanderer of Soviet reality', the Security Police had already received a report from RAPP (or later from the Writers' Union) and instructions from the AGIT-PROP department. By the time such a 'quote' was read, in the majority of cases the writer in question was already in the Lubianka gaol, or in one of the thousands of camps in the Socialist fatherland.

On November 17, 1930, RAPP announced: 'We Soviet writers and dramatists heartily acclaim the true sentinel of the revolution, the OGPU, and petition the Government to award it the Order of Lenin.' To Western readers it may seem an ironic twist of fate that many of those who sponsored this move were silenced or executed during the next two decades. This danger was seen even by such later literary commissars as Alexander Fadeyev, who, with Libedinsky, objected *'to the habit of denouncing a writer as a class enemy, as a Fascist on every excuse at all, thus excluding him altogether from Soviet literature and mostly "including" him somewhere else'.*

Isaac Babel coined in this period his famous phrase that the writers would now have to exhibit the 'heroism of silence'.

The complete 'seizure of power in literature' was accomplished only in 1934 when the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers was convened. According to its statute, the aim of the Union was 'the creation of works of high artistic significance, saturated with the heroic struggle of the international proletariat, with the grandeur of the victory of Socialism, and reflecting the great wisdom and heroism of the Communist Party'.

The seizure of power in literature was complete indeed and the pattern of Party control and administration of literature was evolved for the entire Communist world. This pattern must be described in some detail since it has its exact replica in every country of the Sino-Soviet orbit.

The Writers' Union in the USSR (and in every other Communist State) wields far more power and has far greater benefits at its disposal than any trade union anywhere in the world. No active writer can afford to stand aside from it. All Soviet literary journals are either official organs of the WU or are indirectly controlled by it. Editorial boards of newspapers and periodicals (State-owned, i.e. Party-owned) are entirely dependent on the decisions of the WU, acting in accordance with the wishes of the Party Central Committee. Only members can publish; expelled former members are usually forbidden to publish unless they have recanted or have been rehabilitated.

The WU is exempt from all local and State taxes. It controls the 'Literary Fund of the USSR' which receives from periodicals and publishers ten per cent of money paid to authors and two per cent of the entertainment tax in the country. The LITFOND maintains 'Houses of Creation' for writers, sanatoria, rest homes, restaurants and kindergartens; it allocates holidays to writers and *provides monetary grants to writers who are at work on lengthy new projects.* The WU and LITFOND control the material existence of writers. Expulsion from the WU means that identity documents no longer specify writing as a profession. The expelled writer either seeks some other employment (which is difficult for such a person) or is classed as a man of no profession, unemployed, and

for this can be classified as a vagrant and lose the right of domicile in the town where he has hitherto dwelt.

The WU and the LITFOND (usually governed by the same persons) are naturally closely geared to the Party apparatus. The parent body is the Culture and Science Section of the Party Central Committee which reports directly to the Secretariat on all literary problems. The WU is ideologically under the control also of AGITPROP.

The monolith has the writer completely in its grip. All non-conformist writing in the Communist world should be read in the light of this fact.

* * *

At the first Writers' Union Congress, Stalin called the writers 'engineers directing the construction of the human soul', and Zhdanov explained that these engineers of the human soul can remould the reader's mentality in the spirit of Socialism only by 'Socialist realism', that is by depicting the pattern of the glorious Communist future; by superimposing that future on the Soviet reality of the present. Zhdanov left no doubt about the Party line on literature:

> 'Our Soviet literature is not afraid of being accused of tendentiousness; yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in the age of class struggle a non-class, non-tendentious, would-be apolitical literature does not and cannot exist.'

Karl Radek told the first Writers' Congress:

> 'If a writer finds it hard to give up his most intimate, individual shades of opinion, let him study the experiences of the Soviet revolution and he will then see that if he wants to fight . . . against imperialism . . . he must march in the ranks of the masses. But if he sets his so-called shades of opinion in opposition to the masses, then it will be shown that this is not his individual opinion, but the opinion of some bourgeois group, hostile to the proletariat.'

Radek was soon sentenced to ten years in prison as an enemy of the proletariat, and the Soviet writers learnt

to shun individual shades of opinion and that even such a thing as individual style was becoming increasingly dangerous.

Novels were expected to serve as political handbooks. Gladkov's novel *Energy*, about the construction of the Dnieprostroi dam, for instance, was praised by the critic Stetski in the following words: 'In art form, the book reveals to every Party worker, to every activist many aspects of the relations between people, or organisation and leadership which are indispensable for every Party worker to know in order to lead correctly and conquer in the struggle.'

Novelists were expected to describe Party officials, workers and peasants not as they are but as *they should be according to the Party*. 'Schematism' was born. In each novel, play and short story the 'positive hero' was expected to be a perfect Communist, while the 'negative hero' represented the quintessence of all bourgeois evils. Local and temporal difficulties could be pictured only against the 'global picture', that is against the background of the overwhelmingly 'positive' achievement of Soviet society.

'Psychologisation' became anathema. In 1930 the central organ of the Party, *Pravda*, attacked the 'completely erroneous slogan: *living man*'. According to *Pravda*, a proletarian writer trying to depict 'living man' is turned into an objective observer, a naturalist, a psychological realist; he blunts his class-consciousness and weakens 'his orientation in relation to the most important problems of the reconstruction period—the problem of class struggle and of extirpation of the roots of capitalism'. The slogan 'living man' makes him forget the 'class man' and see only the many-sidedness of the psychology of their characters. It is a slogan that teaches the proletarian writers 'to find good in evil, to reveal the stabs of conscience in the deserter, to find flashes of remorse in the traitor'.

Soviet novels—like the forced confessions of the purge trial victims—had to be peopled by Soviet angels and anti-Party monsters, and the plot had to illustrate the fact that the Party is always right. This was the essence

of 'Socialist realism', according to the testimony of Soviet writers on the subject.

* * *

It was during the period of liquidation of the peasants and of the great Stalin purges that writers sank lowest in the esteem of the Soviet people. Many of them were hated and despised. According to Stalin during the drive to force collectivisation on agriculture some ten million peasants were liquidated. From every village in the Soviet Union dozens or hundreds of peasants were deported to forced labour camps. The famous Stalin-Molotov order of May 8, 1933 concerning the mass-arrests of 'kulaks' (rich peasants) specified the categories of peasants who were to be deported along with their entire families; in other cases it was sufficient to deport the head of the family and evict his family from house and land.

Millions of peasants were executed and the countryside was full of *bezprizorny*, roaming bands of orphans. In the new collective farms there was the terror régime of the Secret Police. The collective farmers were hungry, frightened and lethargic. In every district thousands of Communists were arrested for sympathising with the peasants. They had been sent out from the cities as shock troopers of forced collectivisation, but when they were unable to commit the crimes the Party expected of them they were arrested. The cities were full of escaped peasants who lay about the streets, starving and begging.

And it was in this period that hundreds of novels were published about the glorious fight for collectivisation. Each of these novels described a village where the fight started between the reactionary peasants, clinging to their individual farms, and the progressive poor peasants who had found their way to the Party and wanted collectivisation. Once the collective farm was founded through 'persuasion' there were some initial difficulties. Rain, flood or drought threatened the harvest, lurking saboteurs caused damage, but in the end—with the lead of a 'positive hero', a poor peasant or the chairman of the collective, or more often the Party secretary—the fight

was carried to a victorious end. The collective farm waxed happy and rich. For the happy ending the fine, manly NKVD officer arrived and arrested the base saboteurs, the vile enemies of the people.

This story with local variations, e.g. in the type of 'positive hero' or heroes, appeared *ad nauseam*. No one could pretend to be ignorant of the horrors of collectivisation, yet these novels went on to paint idealised (not to say fictional) pictures of the happy peasants and their kind, fatherly NKVD protectors.

Similarly in factories all over the land of the Soviets, trade unions were turned into auxiliary organs of the Secret Police, working hours were lengthened, real wages lowered; living conditions kept on deteriorating—yet the novels about the well-fed and contented workers and their heroic victories over difficulties painted year by year a more glowing picture of the workers' life.

These novels, similar plays and short stories and the odes and hymns to Stalin and to his principal henchmen, had the effect of turning people away from contemporary Soviet literature.

The literary products of this period were often produced according to announced plans. When a new industrial plant was under construction, 'writers' brigades' went to live on location and fulfilled (or 'overfulfilled') their plan in step with the actual construction. In all these literary products Stalin had to play a role. Often he was the *deus ex machina* who solved the difficulty, appearing in person or sending a message. His warm and fatherly guidance were an integral part of this kind of Party literature. And only those writers who were in prison or were 'heroes of silence' escaped having to write this kind of stuff. First-class writers managed to make the farrago of lies and nonsense somewhat less revolting, but even they had to incorporate into their writing some part of the Big Lie.

* * *

In 1936 when the great purge started, Fadeyev became President *and* Secretary-General of the Writers' Union. He kept this position till 1944 and again during the

1946–54 period. Most of this time he was President or Secretary of the Party LIT-COM, Chairman of the Stalin Prize Committee and one of the grey eminences of State publishing—in short, dictator of Soviet literature. He introduced himself to the free world with his unique performance at the 1948 Wroclaw International Peace Congress when he indulged in extraordinarily savage attacks on Western culture. He vilified the 'decadent British intellectuals', denounced American culture as 'giving off the stench of decay' and came out with the oft-quoted statement: *'If hyenas could type and jackals could use fountain pens, they would write like T. S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, Dos Passos, Jean-Paul Sartre or André Malraux.'* This was the Soviet literary dictator for fourteen years.

* * *

The balance sheet of the Stalin era in literature cannot be drawn up yet.

The outside world has some idea of the flood of incredibly dull Party novels written in *Pravda* language which forced the Russian reading public to turn in ever greater degree to the past, to their great classics of the nineteenth century. We do not know on the other hand how many novels of merit were banned at the outset. In Soviet Party documents and in the statements of Soviet writers during the post-Stalin thaw many hundreds of such cases are mentioned.

The other side of the balance sheet—the suicides, the imprisonment and execution of writers—could be only guessed at when, during the thaw, some writers, like Kirshon, Yesenski, Koltsov, Tretyakov and others, were posthumously rehabilitated. Other writers were released from prisons and concentration camps, some after seventeen years of imprisonment. They too were declared innocent. But Isaac Babel and many others died in concentration camps. During this period it was learned that Boris Pilnyak had been shot; but we still do not know what kind of death was inflicted on the dramatists Arakadin, Auroglobali, Liadov, Meyerhold, Rafalsky and Nathalie Salz, to mention only the better known names.

The Soviet official histories still claim that Gorki was poisoned.

During the thaw no mention was made of such 'unpersons' as the literary critics Averbakh, Borbatyov, Lelevich, M. I. Nusinov and Lesenev. Among writers more or less known in the West, nothing could be learnt of the fate of such 'disappeared persons' as Tarasov-Rodjonov, Panteleimon Romanov, Ossip Mandelstam, Mirsky and many others. Of Ukrainian writers and of those of the other nationalities of the Soviet Union a far greater proportion was executed and imprisoned than in Russia. Jews are treated as a suspect national minority in the Soviet Union and a succession of Jewish writers have been imprisoned or executed as 'reactionary Zionists' or 'bourgeois cosmopolitans'.

The suicide list of the better-known Russian writers is also quite long. Officially it is not denied that Mayakovsky, Yesenin, Andrei Sobol, Vladimir Piast, Marina Tsetayeva, Kuznietsov and Alexander Fadeyev committed suicide.

Some writers have been 'only' silenced for many years. These include, besides Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Zoshchenko, Seypilina, N. Erdman and Yuri Olesha.

Fadeyev said of Boris Pasternak in 1946 that he 'represents that individualism which is profoundly alien to the spirit of our own society'. Anna Akhmatova, the poet, was called by Zhdanov in 1946 'a whore and a nun in whom fornication is mingled with prayer'. Zoshchenko was branded, also in 1946, as 'a monstrous slanderer of Soviet society, a vile enemy of the people'. These writers were then silenced for a long period.

Soon after Stalin's death those developments began which later came to be known as the 'thaw'. In 1953 open or veiled denunciation of Party direction of literature was growing more and more frequent. *Pravda* carried several articles attacking timid playwrights who, rather than expose themselves to the charge of slandering Soviet reality, simply 'varnished' it. *Pravda* complained that the theatres were empty because Soviet people were bored by the 'conflict-less' life of their supposed 'ideal-self'. A few months later the playwright A. Salinsky (*Literary Gazette*,

October 20, 1953) wrote: 'The saddest thing is that some of the writers have not freed themselves from the internal censor who *for so long* sat at the side of the writer and bound his thought, his tongue.'

In the same month at the plenary meeting of the Writers' Union, Konstantin Simonov denounced 'the widespread and harmful custom of demanding from authors the varnishing and dressing-up of the past by re-writing their works in accordance with anti-historical canons', the observance of which meant that 'the shock workers of the Five Year Plans, the stakhanovites of the middle-thirties and the workers of the post-war period ... scarcely differ from each other'.

In September 1953 Vera Inber told an audience of critics that the Soviet public was tired of 'the same steam shovel, the same dam, the same road'. The typical Soviet critic was reproached for 'not daring to express his personal opinion', and carefully picking his way instead from quotation to quotation.

The poetess Olga Berggolts wrote in *Literary Gazette*: 'In a great many of our lyric poems, the most important thing is lacking: humanity, the human being.'

The most devastating exposure of the literary climate of the Stalin era was made by leading Soviet writers. When Lydia Seyfulina, a talented novelist of the early twenties, died in the fifties after having been silenced for more than twenty years, her colleagues attributed her silence to her 'inner organic resistance to any lie'. Seyfulina was a naturalist of the old school and 'she could produce only truthful writing'. In a tribute to her memory Ehrenburg said that Seyfulina's adherence to truth was a very great achievement because 'we do not find truth scattered under our feet on the highways of our literature'.

Marietta Shaginyan, who like Ehrenburg deviated from truth rather than give up writing, comparing the silence of her friend Seyfulina to the lying of the active writers, said: 'One does not necessarily become a liar by uttering certain kinds of lie.... I am speaking about the special form of lie which is bred by the necessity to dissemble, to make oneself inconspicuous, to ensconce oneself, and

live within oneself—the kind of lie which has infected . . . many, many of us writers. That lie is essentially a defensive mask which the imperfection of social relations . . . may force one to wear until it grows to one's face. . . .'

The behaviour of the Soviet reading public seems to indicate that they agree with the statement that one does not necessarily become a liar by uttering certain kinds of lie. They knew that if a writer wanted to have his work published at all he had to incorporate some of the compulsory lies in his writings. This gave him a chance to mix in some truthful writing and, what is even more important, to convey important truths hidden between the lines. The Soviet reading public read the early 'thaw' novels (unnoticed by the West) with great excitement precisely because they could ignore the lip-service paid to certain obligatory lies. Wherever the régime insists on a *littérature dirigée* the reading public responds instantly to truthfully writing under the camouflage of the compulsory ceremonial verbiage.

This period received its name from Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *The Thaw*, which was published in the 1954 May issue of *Znamya*. It was mistakenly reported in the Western press that Ehrenburg's daring novel was the first exposure of the entire climate of tyranny. This is not so. Uspenskaya, Leonid Leonov and others had published similar nonconformist novels already in 1953. Some of these had been written before Stalin's death and their daring passages are not last-minute additions.

Many writers cannot exercise inner censorship. They write freely without thinking of censorship and the Soviet publishers' stranglehold on literature. Their technique was —and probably is again—to forget everything while writing, not to interrupt the flow of thought by prudent considerations, and then, before sending the manuscript to the publishers, to cut out the most daring passages and to 'tone down' others. After Stalin's death, when writers in their activities as publicists were already attacking tyranny, some of the novelists simply did not censor and revise their novels according to Party tenets. This is the

explanation of the many 'thaw' novels and plays so soon after Stalin's death.

Most of the early examples exposed the persecution, arrest or execution of innocent people. Uspenskaya, grand-daughter of the famous nineteenth-century novelist Gleb Uspensky, published in 1953 her novel *Our Summer*, whose hero, Professor Lopatin, is the victim of senseless persecution. At the university the professor observes a strange new phenomenon in the faculty:

> 'Some words lost their original meaning and a new terminology emerged. Thus, for instance, the word "opinion" ceased to exist. If the trend of thought of this or that professor or scientific worker did not coincide with the trend of thought of the director, then this was no longer called an opinion or a scientific hypothesis, but an "error". Objections . . . were called . . . not deliberations or scientific discussions, but an "attack". After an incautious professor committed an "error" and launched an "attack", his future was predetermined. At first, a label was stuck on him as on a stuffed bird. The label indicated the name of that species of erring with which the guilty professor was hereafter to be identified. . . . After a professor was thus labelled, there was no longer any need to argue with him or to try to convince him that he was not right. They began to "work on him". If he remained stubborn, then purely administrative means came into force. . . .'

'Administrative means' is of course only a polite expression for dismissal, expulsion from the Party and/or arrest. Uspenskaya's *Our Summer* showed how the very essence of science was endangered by the dogmatism of ignorant commissars and how bureaucratic despotism attacks the very possibility of scientific pioneering and all creative effort.

The hero of Leonid Leonov's *The Russian Forest* (published in 1953), Professor Vikhrov, is in a similar situation to that of Professor Lopatin. He is saved by the efforts of his daughter, Polya, a representative of the new Soviet generation. She has been indoctrinated all her life

about the vileness of the rotten and rotting capitalist world, the old world, yet she longs to see it:

> 'I have often read about it and I simply cannot figure one thing out. There it has been rotting for centuries and yet there it still stands. How I'd just love to get a peep at it, perhaps through a tiny chink. Just what is this thing with such durability and vitality? Why hasn't it exploded and fallen to pieces long ago from the sheer weight of human pain and grief alone?'

Polya Vikhrov is a Komsomolka (member of the Party youth organisation), her father a Party member, yet they do not pretend to believe in the 'sheer weight of human pain and grief' dragging down the rotting capitalist world; they long for a time and a country where 'you do not have to lock the doors, where you can have friends rather than enemies around you'.

Professor Vikhrov complains often in the novel about the climate of distrust and fear, about the vile 'gas of doubt . . . which makes contemporaries doubt one another'. *The Russian Forest* shows that people living in the 'happy collective of Soviet society' are in fact lonely, frightened and enervated individuals, exposed to a crossfire of impossible demands, picking their way wearily between 'blocks of lies'.

Also in 1953 Vera Panova, author of three Stalin Prize-winning works, published the novel *Seasons of the Year*. Its greatest merit is the lack of 'varnishing'. The dreary drudgery, the bleak life of the Soviet Proletariat is depicted truthfully with compassion and understanding. Through the life of two ordinary Soviet families and through the story of the disintegration of two 'potentially good men' we meet a whole series of Soviet types, from weak factory directors sliding into corruption to young workers turning into underworld characters.

For the Soviet public Ehrenburg's famous *The Thaw* was just one more sign of changing times. The title was soon turned into a slogan and a demand. 'The thaw must go on after the inclement winter of the Stalin era.'

The Thaw is a short novel about ordinary and less ordinary people who live in a Volga town near Saratov.

The life of the workers is shown as rather hopeless drudgery. The novel's only positive characters are an old 'idealist Communist', Pukhov, who according to his son retained some of his faith because he 'grew up in another age—a revolutionary romantic'; and a talented but non-conformist painter, Saburov, who is starving because the officials blacklist him. Saburov's ideal in painting is Raphael. The 'negative hero', Volodia Pukhov, the son of the old Communist, is a disillusioned cynic. He is a highly successful painter, pampered by the commissars. Talking to Saburov, he remarks: 'Raphael wouldn't be admitted to the Soviet Artists' Union.'

For the Soviet public it was obvious that there was quite a lot of autobiographical element in the painter Pukhov, who, like Ehrenburg, wasted much of his talent and destroyed much of his artistic personality through opportunism, prudent manoeuvring and adaptation to the ever-changing Party line. Significantly in the same period Ehrenburg stated in an interview that 'Stendhal would not be admitted today to the Soviet Writers' Union.' With *The Thaw* Ehrenburg turned against the entire climate of *littérature dirigée*, showing that Party direction of the arts led inevitably to the atrophy of art.

* * *

These and many similar novels and short stories gave a full picture of Soviet reality. Most aspects of bureaucratic despotism were exposed. The Western readers of translations of such novels should bear in mind that for them large sections of this literature do not 'connect' at all. They have not been exposed to decades of organised public falsehood. Living in an atmosphere of free public opinion, they fail to notice that slight changes from the Soviet norm really imply a daring attack on the formulae or even on the entire system. Some years later a Polish writer described this situation very well:

> 'In our public, political and intellectual life, in our organisations and newspapers, there exists a special figurative speech. It consists of the usage of certain turns of phrase. . . . All that is needed is a clue. Those who have

guessed that clue are able to read public utterances as if they were an open book and thus learn a lot of things. It goes without saying that one has to read between the lines, to follow hidden ideas.... To be able to follow the figurative speech one has to possess many years' training in reading it; one must have lived for years in milieux indulging in this form of speech; one must have lived for many years in our country. Those who cannot read our special language are as naive as little children.'—*J. Kisielewski* in *'Tygodnik Powszechny'*.

The 'thaw' writings contained, besides *manifest* attacks on the régime, even more *latent* attacks, even more 'between-the-lines' exposure. Western students of Soviet literature who have read some of these works in the original, have missed much of the hidden meaning, although they have been professional 'Sovietologists' of many years' standing. This may be a further explanation for the fact that so few Dudintsevs and Pasternaks were noticed by the West. But for the Soviet people the thaw went on and soon it could have been more aptly described as a forest fire. Poets, playwrights, novelists wrote in increasing numbers and with ever-growing daring everything they could not write during the Stalin era. The culmination came in 1956, after Khrushchev's speech on Stalin's crimes. At the same Congress, Mikhail Sholokhov, the leading Soviet novelist, attacked in no uncertain terms Party administration of literature. He said:

'The Union of Soviet Writers has ... a total of 3,773 persons armed with pens and possessing literary skill of one degree or another.... But don't let this figure alarm you or gratify you.... A large part of the list of authors consists of "dead souls"... Strange as it may sound, they have nothing to write about.... The Writers' Union has gradually changed from the creative organisation which it should be into an administrative organisation, and although the Secretariat has industriously held meetings ... nevertheless, *there have been* no books.... Fadeyev turned out to be quite a power-loving General Secretary.... Couldn't Fadeyev have

been told long ago: *"The Writers' Union is not a military unit and certainly not a disciplinary barracks."*'

(On May 14, 1956 Fadeyev committed suicide. He was given a sumptuous State funeral with Khrushchev, Molotov and Bulganin as guards of honour.)

By the time of this XXth Congress, the rehabilitation of wrongly imprisoned persons had been going on quietly for some time. Well-known revolutionaries, writers, historians now declared innocent emerged after ten to seventeen years of imprisonment. As the thaw progressed, they dared to meet people. They even met their writer friends. The present writer has a large collection of poems written during this third period, under the impact of the rehabilitation process. In Russia, Armenia, Hungary, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, everywhere Communist poets struggled with the ugly truth, like the Soviet poetess Margarita Aliger. Her poem, *The Truth*, was published in *Oktyabr* (No. II, 1956). A few typical lines:

My friend of youthful days was cruelly slandered by his enemies.
My dearest soul, I know you won't forget the sorrow, humiliation and torture.
We said: 'There must be something in all that. . . .'
We raised our hands voting for the calumny.
But, oh bitter shame, I did not try to defend him.

And again a few lines from *That Year*, by Olga Berggolts (*Novy Mir*, No. 8, 1956):

That year! Made me remember my whole life,
I lived through everything again. . . .
That year, when from the bottom of the sea and the canals,
My friends began coming back again.

Why should I try to hide the fact that not many returned.
Seventeen years are seventeen long years.

During 1956 and 1957 the 'thaw', as far as the writers were concerned, continued. Dudintsev's *Not by Bread*

Alone was published in the magazine *Novy Mir* in the late autumn of 1956, creating a sensation in Russia. There were turbulent meetings of young writers and university students, at which this novel was discussed. But the reaction had already set in. Dudintsev was branded as 'a calumniator who takes malicious joy in describing the negative sides of Soviet life'. At the March 1957 meeting of the Moscow writers Dudintsev said:

> 'I think that we might be allowed, like beginners, to try to swim on our own, to take our chance of drowning. But alas, I always feel a halter, like a harness by which children are sometimes supported. And it keeps me from swimming.'

By this time, some of the 'thaw' novels were already on the defensive. In Galina Nikolayeva's *Struggle on the Way*, published in *Oktyabr* (March–July 1957), one of the heroes criticises some Soviet shortcomings but he emphasises that he is not a *zlopykhatel* (faultfinder): *'I am not maliciously spiteful over our deficiencies. . . . For me our shortcomings are like ulcers on my mother's body. When I see them, all I can think is how to cure them.'* Nikolayeva was nevertheless attacked as a slanderer of Soviet reality.

During the thaw years Russian writers made new attacks on the theory of Socialist realism. One of the most effective attacks was made by a poet who wrote an oriental fable. Replace the Kham Akhmet with Soviet reality—as Russian readers did—and you have in a nutshell: Socialist realism.

THREE PORTRAITS

An oriental fable

By Sergey Mikhalkov

(author of the Soviet National Anthem)

One handed and one eyed
The powerful Khan Akhmet
Wanted to be portrayed
So he ordered a portrait.

To his painters, who were three,
He put his wish not so subtle:
In the picture he wanted to see
Himself on a horse in a battle.

The trumpets call to judgment
Of Khan powerful and great:
The first two painters sent
The portraits they had made.

The first portrait aroused
His anger and dismay:
The artist had presented
His Khan in a wrong way!

His hands are on a bow and
In his eyes a stern look!
'I have one eye, one hand,
The painter is a crook!

How dare you change my portrait?
You must atone for that!
Banish the varnisher!'—said
The angry Khan Akhmet.

The other painter the great Khan
Condemned in stronger terms:
'I see through your crafty plan,
You double-faced worm!

You want to please my enemies as
You stress that only one
Eye and one hand has
Your ruler Akhmet Khan!'

Thus portraitist-naturalist
His early death has met. . . .
Another trembling painter is
Bringing the last portrait.

As Akhmet Khan does sideways stand
Not showing his full face,
It is not clear if his right hand
And right eye are in place.

The left hand is in fact
Holding a shield, while
The left eye (still intact)
Looks like an eagle's eye!

The shrewd painter grew rich
Reaped high honours on his way,
Died with many orders which
Were thrust on him (so people say. . . .)

Often the artists among us
Employ a similar style:
They don't portray our life en face,
But always in profile. . . .

In May 1957 the executive of the Writers' Union demanded from the 'thaw' writers that they should recant, which they refused to do. They were curbed only when the first signs of returning dictatorship became obvious. After the purge of the 'anti-Party group' of Malenkov, Molotov, Kaganovich and the others, the official *Literary Gazette* (July 9, 1957) came 'involuntarily to the conclusion that there was a definite connection between them [the anti-party men] and the revisionism and nihilism which for a time captured some writers.'

The two issues of *Literaturnaya Moskva*—full of thaw-like material—were accused of 'poisoning the minds of Soviet youth' by the literary commissar Leonid Sobolev, who evidently forgot for the moment about Socrates. In short: the writers were threatened with administrative measures.

In the autumn of 1957 Margarita Aliger made her self-criticism and promised to remember that 'any work of a Soviet writer is a political work and it is possible to carry it out honourably only by *unswervingly following the Party line and by obeying Party discipline*'. In her

self-criticism she confessed: 'I am sometimes inclined to substitute moral-aesthetic considerations for political ones.'

* * *

The tug of war between the Soviet writers and the commissars went on throughout 1958. The commissars were bent on re-introducing full Party dictatorship over literature, but they met with little success. In the official Party statements issued by the 'lit-commissars', tolerance, humanism, liberalism (in the general sense) and individualism again became terms of abuse. But, on the whole, writers refused to pretend that all was well in the best of all possible cultural climates. In April 1958 Mikhail Sholokhov, who is regarded as the number one writer of the USSR, visited Communist Czechoslovakia, and in interviews given to the Czech press openly attacked Zhdanovism and questioned the very existence of 'Socialist realism'. He was asked to define Socialist realism. His answer was:

> 'Theory is not my field. I am merely a writer. However, I can tell you a story about a meeting with my friend Alexander Fadeyev a short time before his death. I asked him the same question, he said: "If someone asks me that question, I have to answer in all conscience: *the devil knows what it really is*..." Am I a Socialist realist? When you ask me this question I remember how the Marxist theoreticians increasingly pronounced that mine was the work of a Kulak writer; later I became a "counter-revolutionary" writer; and in recent years it is said that I have been a Socialist realist all my life...."

There were many similar symptoms in the public statements and articles of Soviet writers. All of these demonstrated that a great many Soviet writers refused to renounce their 'right to remember'. The sacred principle that the Party is always right in literary and cultural questions is vulnerable as long as people remember the many 'zig-zags' of the Party line on literature. When was the Party right? When it described Sholokhov as a *kulak*

or as a counter-revolutionary—or when it said that he always was a Socialist realist? This question can be asked about a great many other writers. And it is being asked.

To My Critics

By Alexander Twardowski

You all try to give me
This piece of advice—
Sing, by all means, but don't hear, don't see!
Only what's permitted is nice.

I haven't listened to you in vain.
Yet I fear that when these times
Are forgotten, you'll speak once again:
Did you hear, see nothing, in your rhymes?

(*Novy Mir*, No. 7, 1958)

There were frequent allusions to the closed frontiers of the Soviet fatherland, as in the following poem by Evgeni Evtushenko:

The frontiers oppress me.
I feel it awkward
Not to know Buenos Aires,
New York.
I want to wander
As much as I like
In London,
To talk, however brokenly,
With everybody.
Like a boy
I want to ride
On the bus
Through morning Paris.
I want an art
—As varied as myself.

The April 8, 1958 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, after quoting this poem, commented: 'It would not be so bad if Evtushenko wanted only to wander through London

and Paris; the trouble is that he resents living inside the Soviet frontiers.'

The majority of writers stuck to their positions although the Stalinist writers went over to the counter-attack. In 1957 Alexej Surkov, the First Secretary of the Writers' Union, was still complaining about the general atmosphere of thaw in Soviet letters. He stated that he was reluctant to write poems of 'affirmation' for fear of being called a 'varnisher of reality' (*Literary Gazette*, January 15, 1957). But by 1958 his reluctance had evaporated and he started to attack the individualists. The theoretical monthly of the Party, *Kommunist*, announced categorically that in a *Socialist society* '*"only hopelessly backward people" attempt to defend the individual against the State.*'

The most violent attack against thaw-literature was made in Kochetov's novel *The Yershov Brothers*. This work, published in the summer of 1958, was called in Moscow 'the anti-Dudintsev novel'. Kochetov's positive heroes attacked not only the literary relaxation but the XXth Party Congress line and the anti-Stalin campaign. The political thaw started with the 1953 amnesty setting free the victims of the Stalin purges. According to Kochetov, in 1953 'many criminals and rotten elements' had been set free. Even Soviet youth had been affected by these rotten elements and by the general atmosphere. Someone asks in the novel how can young students be rotten. The answer: *In bad weather the rot sets in.... In rain and slush. In short; during a thaw.* The restive intellectuals, the non-conformist scientists, the dissatisfied inventors, the pessimistic writers poison the atmosphere. '*What makes these repulsive insects crawl from their holes? ... The thaw.*'

Kochetov also defends varnishing, glorification and the positive hero:

> 'Glorification? What's wrong with it? Artists have always glorified beauty.... Life without ideals is impossible ... when they tell me there is no ideal, I know what they are driving at. What they really mean is: for thirty-nine years you have been educating the

people but man hasn't changed; you, Comrade Bolsheviks, have failed to change him.'

Curiously enough one of Kochetov's mouthpieces in the novel, a positive hero, complains: 'I call myself a builder of Communism, but I am unable to build my own life.... We haven't solved the problem of personal happiness yet.'

* * *

The attitude to literature under Khrushchev's leadership was demonstrated in 1958 by the Pasternak affair. When Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1958, the Soviet literary commissars had already 'worried' for some years over this outstanding work. Although in 1958 they tried to convince Soviet readers that it had little literary value, they knew better. The 'Zhivago poems' from the work in progress were printed by the monthly of the Writers' Union, *Znamya*, in 1954. When the manuscript of the novel was given to an Italian publisher, the First Secretary of the Writers' Union, Surkov, went to Milan in great haste to try to prevent its publication. After the failure of this mission, it was planned to publish the novel in Russia too. (This was stated by the Director of Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga during the 1958 Frankfort Book Fair.)

Pasternak was threatened by the commissars with all sorts of consequences if he did not withdraw his book from the Italian publishers. Surkov, the chief literary commissar, reminded Pasternak in a printed interview of the fate of Boris Pilnyak, who also had a book published abroad and was shot in consequence. When the book became a best seller and received the Nobel Prize, Pasternak was pressed to reject it and was expelled from the Writers' Union. He was deprived of the title: 'Soviet Writer' and was officially told that 'an ignominious end awaits both *Doctor Zhivago*, that resurrected Judas, and the author, whose fate will be that of popular contempt'.

But Boris Pasternak was by no means the only writer officially punished in 1958. Konstantin Simonov, poet, playwright, novelist, winner of the Stalin Prize, former

holder of many Party offices and the recipient of many high Soviet awards, also fell into disgrace. Simonov became editor of the literary periodical *Novy Mir* in 1954 when the rebellious Alexander Twardowski was deposed from editorship. Simonov's task was to re-establish Party guidance over *Novy Mir*. Instead, in 1957 and 1958 Simonov committed such grave crimes against 'parteinost' (Party-spirit) that he had to exercise self-criticism, was deposed from the editorship and exiled to Uzbekistan.

Simonov was previously one of the Party writers most disliked by the members of the Writers' Union. Sholokhov said of him contemptuously in 1956: 'What can our youth learn from Simonov except the technique of diplomatic behaviour?' Yet Simonov, the diplomatist, fell foul of Khrushchev after serving Stalin well. In the atmosphere of the thaw he made some diplomatic criticism of the state of Soviet literature. One example has already been given. Another instance was his criticism of the 'no conflict' theory in literature. According to this theory the economic basis for conflicts had been removed from Soviet life. Simonov remarked: 'The varnishing of life in Soviet literature is connected . . . with unwillingness to bother ourselves with criticism of mistakes, shortcomings, of the negative and unhealthy manifestations actually existing in life. It is not by chance that varnishing of life appeared in particularly acute form in literary works on the subject of life in the countryside. For it was in this sphere of life that there were the greatest number of shortcomings, mistakes, examples of neglect and *extremely sharp contrast between the real situation and the way it was described during a number of years.*'

This very diplomatic allusion to the real fate of the Soviet peasantry, to the mass-terror and mass-murder with which collectivisation was forced on the countryside, and to the drab propaganda novels purporting to show the happiness of Soviet peasants, was ridiculed by several writers. Someone said that it was a world record in timid under-statement. Yet Khrushchev's commissars found it too rebellious for their liking.

* * *

Towards the end of 1958 and early in 1959 the Writers' Unions of the various Soviet republics held congresses at which the literary commissars carried on 'their resolute fight against revisionism in literature'. It was made clear to the Russian Writers' Congress in December 1958 that varnishing is a forgivable sin. The Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Kirgiz, Latvian, Moldavian and other Writers' Unions were told by their First Secretaries that 'nationalism is the most poisonous and most tenacious' bourgeois deviation in their midst. In Armenia and some other republics the writers were again reprimanded for 'seeking refuge in the past'. In Esthonia, Lithuania, Moldavia and Azerbaidzhan, prominent authors and groups of young writers were attacked for their strikes of silence. The writers on their side voiced their usual complaints.

The lesson to be derived from these congresses was that if the Party wanted to produce some show of unanimity at the All-Union Writers' Congress some concessions had to be made and the leadership must demonstrate its vigilance over the erratic writers. Just before this congress there was another usual symptom of trouble. The Soviet newspapers started to report a drop in the circulation of the so-called 'fat' literary journals. This was a natural reaction of the reading public to the 're-drabification' of literature. Soviet readers, too, started again to take refuge in the past.

When the Third All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers opened on May 18, 1958 Khrushchev was present along with almost the entire Party Presidium. In his exceedingly long speech to the writers Khrushchev said that 'the angels of conciliation are flying about in the air' and promised that the defeated revisionist writers would no longer be persecuted, provided they yielded. Yet the statutes of the Writers' Union were altered to include the following clause: 'The Union will wage a resolute fight against all ideological deviations, above all against revisionism, at the same time will fight resolutely against sectarianism, dogmatism and vulgarism.'

The slogan of the Congress was: 'A great literature for the great age!' This could be achieved by the method of Socialist realism under the wise guidance of the Party.

Khrushchev and the leading literary functionaries came out in defence of the positive hero and of the well-intentioned varnishers. In fact, the Third Congress differed not at all from the first two.

At the first congress in 1934 the angels of reconciliation were also flying and the odious RAPP functionaries were demoted. At the second congress in 1954 the hated Fadeyev was replaced as First Secretary by Surkov, whom Sholokhov duly advised 'not to become the sergeant-major of Soviet literature and not to forget that in the orchestra of Russian poetry there are other instruments besides drums and trumpets'. Now the novelist Konstantin Fedin has replaced Surkov as First Secretary and has duly promised to refrain from bureaucratic methods in dealing with literature.

As at previous congresses, some deviationist writers having made proper recantation, like Margarita Aligher and A. Yashin, were rehabilitated. Voices of dissent and of warning were also not lacking. Alexander Twardowski for instance stated: 'We can no longer go on living like this—we have to say this about our literary yesterday and even about our today.' Paustovskii warned the congress that if writers must deal always with topical subjects 'we will have no literature in the full meaning of the word'.

After such warnings, the writers unanimously decided 'to act as passionate propagandists of the Seven Year Plan'.

The only surprise of the congress was in the official report of the First Secretary, who emphasised that one of the future tasks of literary historians and critics was 'to work out in detail the solutions of the theoretical problems of Socialist realism'. Some of the writers present must have remembered the scores of Party edicts issued during the last three decades boasting that these problems had been solved.

After the XXIst Party Congress in 1959 Khrushchev emerged as supreme dictator. Again 'one man owns the truth' and attempts are being made to 'relegate artists to the role of illustrators and ode-singers'.

Up to the time of writing the Khrushchev era is not

as dark as the Stalin period was. Quite apart from Khrushchev's present intentions, there are serious obstacles in the way of the revival of total terrorism. The period when Stalin was dethroned and his mass-murders exposed cannot be totally eradicated from the memory of people. The Security Police is less feared. The Communist world has suffered many shocks, from the Tito affair to the Hungarian and Tibetan rebellions. At the XXth Party Congress the theoretical edifice of 'Marxism-Leninism' was badly shattered. Sections of it were demolished by Khrushchev, Mikoyan and others, and the gaps remain as yet unfilled.

It will presumably be more difficult this time for the commissars to stifle the writers entirely. This is after all only a revival, a *reprise*, of the drama. The writers are not embarking upon this period with that ignorance of the true essence of the Party, that blind faith in the leaders and that heroic romanticism which moved them after the revolution. This revolution has devoured thousands of its children and grandchildren; bureaucratic despotism has been exposed as such; there is a new generation of Soviet people and writers. The ferment seems to go on.

What does the State require from its citizens? It requires consistency in devotion to State or régime. A consistent citizen will always collaborate proudly with the Secret Police, knowing well that it is a necessary factor of the State's existence, its development, its splendour.... Any citizen who would hesitate to write denunciations for the Secret Police is most certainly an inconsistent citizen.... Convictions about an absolute and exclusive superiority of certain values to which all other things are subordinated must, when universally applied and practised, turn the human world into a battlefield....—*Leszek Kolakowski in 'Tworczosc', Poland, No. 9, 1958.*

We demand the right to err.... Pity, we are granted this right only reluctantly and on the condition that after all our errors we return to the correct road. This is a vain condition.... If we knew in the beginning of every search what the results were to be, all search would become unnecessary.—*Ivan Mojik in 'Kulturny Zivot', Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, July 5, 1958.*

The Party knows more about literature even than the writers themselves.—*Party Secretary Istvan Kovacs, in 'Tarsadalmi Szemle', Hungary, December 1955.*

3
Writers against Tyranny in East Europe

THE European satellites, or colonies of the Soviet Empire, differ greatly in political history and cultural level as in many other respects. But the tragedy of the writers has been very similar in all of these countries.

The Soviet first period, up to the complete seizure of power in literature, was in their case compressed into a few years, four at most. All of these countries were under Hitlerite occupation; their nationals were taken in large numbers to the Nazi concentration camps and gas chambers, not to speak of the hundreds of thousands of Jews killed in their midst or carted away to annihilation camps. Poland witnessed the Warsaw ghetto massacre, on the Danube embankments in Budapest thousands of Jewish children were machine-gunned and thrown into the river by the Nazis.

The nightmare of Fascism made some of the war-weary and emaciated people hopeful that the Red Army brought real liberation. For many writers and intellectuals Communism seemed to be the only alternative to and defence against Fascism.

Like some Western writers of pre-war days, many writers of these countries joined the Communist Party. The analysis of that controlled schizophrenia which holds Communist intellectuals in its grip does not belong to these pages. It is enough to state here that many Communist writers sincerely felt that they had to sacrifice some of their individuality, part of their artistic credo, for the sake of humanity's brighter day-after-tomorrow. During its fight for power the Communist Party allowed in all of these countries far greater freedom to writers than it did

after the seizure of power. The Party line on literature was until about 1948 or 1949 quite flexible and tolerant. Sympathisers and fellow-travellers were wooed.

During the transition to the second period and after the establishment of dictatorship over literature hundreds of writers were imprisoned. The difference from the Soviet experience was again in time. While in the USSR Communist writers and literary commissars had long years in which to flourish before the years of eclipse and arrest came, in the satellites the season of flowering was short and arrest came without an intervening period of gradual eclipse. The advent of full tyranny was swifter in East Europe than in the USSR and therefore the shock was far greater.

Similarly, the third or 'thaw' period was more sudden in its advent. Writers whose names figured prominently in the 'ode-books' (collections of odes and hymns written to the Great Stalin, and to the local Stalins) were, two or three years later, leaders of the literary rebellion. The period of thaw, the emergence of the innocently imprisoned thousands and the posthumous rehabilitation of hundreds of prominent purge-victims, was a sudden shock in these countries, almost impossible for Western readers to imagine.

The political ferment after Stalin's death was swifter and more evident in the East European countries, which were comparatively less isolated from the outside world. The news of the East German risings, the Vorkuta rebellion and reports of signs of resistance all over the Communist world gave hope to the people and courage to the writers. Captive minds were in process of liberation. Sincerely convinced Communist writers went through the greatest crises of their lives. Their faith collapsed, they felt that their purest ideals were drowned in a flood of blood and filth. Some went through nervous breakdowns. Some felt there was nothing left to believe. Most of them had grave qualms of conscience for not seeing through their blinkers, for believing in the guilt of the innocent victims of the purges. They could not forgive the Party leaders. They had sacrificed—so it appeared—their individuality, their artistic credo, the true writer in themselves,

not for the happier future of humanity but for a pointless and murderous lie.

Only then did they see what eight or ten years of Communist despotism had done to their countries.

The revolt against the commissars went deeper in East Europe for another and most important reason: the commissars were regarded as colonial governors of a foreign power. It was a nationalist revolt against Soviet Russian oppression. The demand for independence of literature was linked to the wish for national independence.

At the time of Stalin's death hundreds of young writers in East Europe knew the Russian language well. Reading of the Russian press and literary periodicals was almost compulsory. This proved to be a double-edged weapon, for these writers learned at once about the first stirrings of Russian writers against rigid Party direction of literature. As Ehrenburg had written in the October 1953 issue of *Znamya*:

> 'In pre-revolutionary times an author's life was not easy. . . . But even the most interfering sort of publishers refrained from suggesting to Chekhov the subject of his story. Can one imagine Tolstoy being given an order to write *Anna Karenina* or Gorky being ordered to write *Mother*? A writer so characterless or so indifferent can hardly exist that what he must write about has to be suggested to him.'

Such first signs of resistance to the commissars were eagerly exploited by writers in Budapest, Warsaw and Sofia as an argument for the publication of their far stronger attacks. It must not be forgotten that throughout this period the owner-publisher of all periodicals was and is the Party-State. The Party-appointed editors were and are being controlled by resident commissars at all periodicals. *The eventual publication of any daring article, poem or short story was preceded by an equally or even more daring fight to get the work published.*

A detailed analysis of the 'thaw-writing' in the Sino-Soviet orbit would probably reveal that writers everywhere seized the first chance to launch the maximum possible onslaught against the commissars. If in some coun-

tries this onslaught was delayed it was not due to any lack of determination on the part of the writers. Within the then existing circumstances they simply could not publish. Many works were published in this period which had been written some years earlier. Gyula Illes, the great Hungarian poet, wrote his classic *One Sentence on Tyranny* in 1950; it was published in the revolutionary issue of *Irodalmi Ujsag* on November 2, 1956.

HUNGARY

'There are writers who adapt themselves. The political powers then imagine that these writers have no other concern but to serve or amuse them. Sometimes, however, these entertainers slap the tyrants so hard that the smack resounds forever. . . .'—*Peter Veres in 'Irodalmi Ujsag', September 22, 1956 (one month before the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution).*

The writers of Hungary were the first to rebel, precisely because in Hungary political 'de-Stalinisation' started in advance of the other satellites. Imre Nagy became Premier in July 1953 and promptly started the 'New Course' of relaxation and democratisation with which he went farther than any other East European leader. He was the first to release the many thousands of innocently imprisoned people and to attempt a decisive break with the practice of terrorism.

But during his first premiership, the Stalinist dictator, Rakosi, retained his post as leader of the Party and tried to sabotage the efforts of Premier Nagy. After the fall of Malenkov in 1955, Nagy was deposed as Premier and expelled from the Central Committee. This early political 'thaw' and return to Stalinism meant that Hungary had two thaws and two 're-Stalinisation' periods instead of one of each. Moreover the first re-Stalinisation period in Hungary, from April 1955 to Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin early in 1956, coincided with a general if gradual thaw all over the USSR and the satellites. Hungarians rightly felt that their dictators were at the time more despotic than those of the USSR.

A more detailed record would show the interpenetrating influences in the Soviet orbit. The tug of war between

Stalinists and anti-Stalinists produced alternating and colliding waves in the various countries. Each side was encouraged by gains made by its faction elsewhere. In the same way, the attack by the writers on the commissars in one country found stronger echoes in other countries, which were in their turn re-echoed with even greater daring. Intellectually, as was said earlier, it was more like a forest fire than a thaw.

The intensity and bitterness of the writers' rebellion in Hungary had many other reasons besides those specified. It took a decisive turn in the second half of 1955 after Rakosi's return to power. The playwright Gyula Hay complained in the *Irodalmi Ujsag* (September 10) that excessive bureaucratic control was killing literature. The next issue of the weekly was banned on the grounds that it carried offending poems. By November there was already full-scale organised revolt among the writers. Some forty leading writers signed a memorandum protesting against Party direction of literature. The CENTCOM turned on them with a special resolution:

> 'Certain writers have attacked the Party and the People's Democracy. They voiced calumnies spread by the bourgeois concerning the situation and the standard of living of the working class. . . . They denied the necessity and the right of the Party direction in literature.'

The signatories of the writers' memorandum were Communists. When the Party ordered them to withdraw their signatures, most of them refused to obey.

By this time similar Party resolutions were found necessary to admonish recalcitrant writers in all the countries from East Germany to Roumania and Bulgaria. In Poland, the poet Adam Wazyk was under fire. *Nowa Kultura* (August 21, 1955) printed his famous 'Poem for Adults' in which he described the terror and misery of the Polish people under Communism. This issue became unobtainable through the State distribution network and it soon had a black market value almost a hundred times the original.

During the second de-Stalinisation campaign in Hun-

gary, after Khrushchev's anti-Stalin speech in February 1956, the Hungarian writers were determined to do away once and for all with dictatorship over literature. The Party apparatus was involved in factional struggle, the Security Police leaders were uncertain of their future; the time was ripe for *decisive action*. Endre Enczi, a novelist, became the new editor of the writers' weekly, the *Irodalmi Ujsag*. His first action was to renounce simply and firmly *not only Party direction but also all kinds of censorship*. He turned his periodical into a platform of free writing. Writers silenced or imprisoned for long years again appeared in his pages. All aspects of Communist dictatorship were exposed in articles, poems and short stories. After long years of petrified Party-language, writers again experimented with style and content. They demanded, as later Dudintsev did, the right of experiment. They attacked 'Socialist realism' and the principle that the negative aspects of life under Communism must always be counterbalanced *at the same time* by its allegedly overwhelming positive achievements. A series of articles made fun of the commissars who complain that the writers give a one-sided, negative picture of reality, that they slander reality when they omit to point out *at the same time* the many positive aspects:

> 'Some of Rembrandt's pictures portray, quite wrongly, only rather plain Dutch men and women. His study of an old woman's head, for example, suppresses the "positive" element in the female population of the Low Countries of his day, failing as it does to point out *at the same time* that beauties accounted for a not negligible percentage of contemporary womanhood. In the *Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy slanders all Russian husbands because he omits to mention that, at the same time, the overwhelming majority of Russian husbands were not madly jealous. Similarly, Balzac gives a one-sided picture in *Père Goriot*, because it must be obvious that all daughters in France did not sponge on their fathers with wanton selfishness. Equally condemnable is Shakespeare's omission in *Hamlet* to spotlight the favourable aspects of life and conditions in Denmark

of that period and his failure to record *at the same time*, beside the intellectual prince's languid broodings, the deserving deeds of iron-willed princes and other courtiers.'—*Irodalmi Ujsag, September 14, 1956.*

Irodalmi Ujsag exposed the moral, cultural and economic bankruptcy of Rakosi's murderous dictatorship while Rakosi, and later while his second-in-command, Erno Gero, was still in power, while the Security Police was still in existence. Communist writers, like Lajos Konya, denounced the leaders for killing their convictions:

May God damn them, punish them
Who trampled on our flaming faith!

The young poet-novelist Tibor Tardos spoke for many convinced Communist writers when he told how the atmosphere of organised public falsehood and the Party's hypno-pedagogical treatment had reduced him to a blind phrase-monger: '. . . And gradually without realising how it happened—slowly, slowly with conviction and almost proudly I started to become unaccustomed to thinking.' Imre Takacs wrote: 'But in this country where the poet can write only by stealth, where the law becomes lawlessness . . . it was impossible not to notice how the promised Paradise was turned into hell.'

It was shown that:

'Of all classes of society, that of the workers has been hardest hit by the crimes and errors . . . of an era on which the curtain is now being rung down. How often, while the frenzy of despotic lawlessness was running wild, did it happen that handcuffed workmen were dragged from the factories to the prisons in broad daylight! And how many of them have, in actual fact, been rehabilitated? While more and more was spoken about the leading role of the working class, some of its members being elevated to high places, who cared about the existence of the non-elevated millions? . . . The slogan "don't let's eat up our future!" has been used to throw on working-class shoulders the increasing

burden of financing sundry projects and ventures many of which have turned out complete wash-outs. It has always been up to the workers, more than anyone else, to foot the bill.... Distrust of the people, utter reliance upon a self-redoubling apparatus of steadily multiplying controls, inter-controls and super-controls, the one-man despotism has brought about its end-product: a bureaucracy that has swollen to immense proportions and whose bill must again be met by the workers. Let us nail the lie, my friends: they have neither wages nor, indeed, joys enough.'

'... That the misery of the present generation is the price we must pay for a happier day after tomorrow, is a notorious lie. Future happiness is in the hands of a generation that has wages as well as joys enough.'—*G. Paloczi-Horvath in 'Irodalmi Ujsag', October 19, 1956.*

Tibor Dery, the great novelist, wrote short stories for this weekly in which 'workers recognised themselves'. But also the commissars had been for years demanding precisely this and they were furious when it became obvious that the writers and the workers were fighting on the same broad front against tyranny. *Irodalmi Ujsag* became so popular that every edition was sold out within minutes and some issues had a fifty-fold black market price. Soon other periodicals followed suit. The monthly of the young writers, *Uj Hang* (New Voice) and some other periodicals vied with each other in daring.

Tamas Aczel, the Stalin Prize-winning novelist, wrote a series of articles on the fate of the peasantry, describing how Party Secretaries forced peasants at gun-point to join the kolhozes. In the *Petofi Circle*—named after the poet-hero of the 1848 Hungarian war of liberty, suppressed by the Russians—writers played a leading part.

* * *

On October 23, 1956 the university students and the writers organised a peaceful demonstration in Budapest. Some three hundred thousand people marched through Budapest from the Petofi statue to the statue of General

Bem on the other side of the Danube. The Polish General Bem was one of the greatest generals in the 1848–49 Hungarian War of Liberty. This demonstration opened with Peter Veres, Chairman of the Hungarian Writers' Union, reading the writers' resolution agreed on that morning:

> 'We have arrived at a historic turning-point. We shall not be able to acquit ourselves well in this revolutionary situation unless the entire Hungarian working people rallies around us in discipline. *The leaders of the Party and the State so far have failed to present a workable programme.* The people responsible for this are those who, instead of expanding Socialist democracy, are obstinately organising themselves with the aim of restoring the Stalin and Rakosi régime of terror in Hungary. We, Hungarian writers, have formulated the demands of the Hungarian nation in the following seven points.'

The gist of these was national independence; revision of international treaties on the basis of equality; factories must be run by experts and workers; peasants must be given the right to decide their own fate freely; the people must elect their representatives in Parliament, in the councils and in all autonomous organs of administrations freely, by secret ballot.

That evening, the uprising was triggered off when the Security Police fired on the unarmed students. The workers, the army and the ordinary police joined the fight, which soon became the unanimous uprising of ten million Hungarians.

During the brief spell of victory, before the second Russian attack, the revolutionary issue of the *Irodalmi Ujsag* (November 2, 1956) was published. This, perhaps the most important literary document of the Hungarian revolution, was published in 1957 in scores of languages. Tibor Dery, who is now serving a nine-year prison sentence for his part in the revolt, wrote in this issue:

> 'My friends, I accept the responsibility. I am happy and proud that, together with my fellow writers, our

profession made us the first listeners and reporters of the nation's voice. This . . . revolution was not incited and carried out by individuals, by political groups, by ideas and opinions but by the will of the people. . . . Deeply shaken, I can only now assess the deadly cruelty of pressure exerted on the people—so that they replied to it with such universal accord, with bare hands against the tanks. . . . In 1945 I believed that workers, peasants, all of us who had been excluded from the nation, would found a new country. But during ten years the country has been stolen inch by inch from under our feet. We thought we would be able to build socialism; instead of which they put us behind prison walls built of blood and lies. I feel myself responsible, too, because my eyes were opened late. . . . But we Hungarian writers have one excuse: even if rather late, we opened the fight against tyranny.'

This was written in Hungary, for Hungarians—the eyewitnesses—during the very brief victory period of the revolt. It was written by a Communist writer with some thirty-six years of Party record. This enhances its documentary value.

On November 4, 1956 the Soviet Army started its second large-scale offensive against Hungary. Free Kossuth Radio's last message was of the Writers' Union:

'We ask for the help of every writer and scientist of the world, of every writers' association, of every academy, of all intellectual leaders. Time is short! You know the facts. We do not have to tell these. Help Hungary! Help the Hungarian people! Help the Hungarian writers, scientists, workers, peasants and intelligentsia. Help! Help! Help!'

Then silence from Budapest. After seven days' fighting and two more weeks of a complete and nation-wide general strike, the Soviet divisions had suppressed open resistance. Premier Imre Nagy and his entourage who had taken refuge at the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest, when given a safe conduct to return to their homes, were promptly arrested. The reconstructed Hungarian Security

Police went into action. Writers, leaders of Workers' Councils and students were arrested by the thousand. University students were deported to the USSR. The mass exodus to the West went on. By the time the frontiers were again sealed off 200,000 Hungarians had escaped to the West, among them nearly 50,000 workers, 7,000 university students, and more than a hundred writers and journalists.

In an atmosphere of terror and revenge, with the armoured cars of the Soviet Security Police patrolling the main thoroughfares of Budapest and special Security Police detachments conducting searches in the capital, the Hungarian Writers' Union held its last meeting. It was by then treason to speak of national revolution and the fight for national independence. Yet the writers passed a unanimous resolution placing it on record that Soviet troops had suppressed a unanimous and spontaneous national uprising. The resolution went on:

> 'Here, before the bloodstained remains of our fight for freedom in October, before the lost hopes of an entire nation, we stand morally obliged to account for our actions. As we look at our people, we see them suffering and disappointed. The nation suffered because the ideas which our people greeted hopefully ten years ago were put into practice in an alien form and in a tyrannical manner. During the long period of suffering our nation's wound reopened and national independence seemed to perish. Our suffering people longed for recovery and for an independent national life. It was the overwhelming force of this longing and expectation which opened the way to the protest which erupted from the depths on October twenty-third.
>
> 'As witnesses of this event, it is our duty to declare in all solemnity that the Soviet government committed a historic error when it stained the pure springs of our national rising with blood. Nevertheless the living spirit of our poets and our faith in justice enables us to believe that the time will come when those who have misused their power will have to ask for indulgence, just as the régime which they themselves had

destroyed was forced to repent of having suppressed that national freedom among whose martyrs was the poet Petofi. . . .

'Hungary's basic demands are for national independence and a democratic social order. We writers endorse these demands and we are trying to shape their future form. Our lives and literary activities are based on this idea, and we make this declaration from the cradle of national unity. United by a common goal, we offer a helping hand to the peasants, the workers and our young people. With their help we must convince those in power that politics cannot be an end in itself. It is only a means of achieving the people's well-being. We have a dual task; to achieve national independence on the other hand, and on the other hand to build a new and united Hungarian society based on democratic self-government through the common efforts of peasants, workers and intellectuals.' (December 28, 1956.)

Although this resolution was never published in the Hungarian Communist press, it was widely circulated all over the country and in translation all over the Sino-Soviet orbit. The commissars' answer was to ban *Irodalmi Ujsag* and the Writers' Union, and to arrest scores of writers and intellectuals.

It was now the turn of writers all over the Communist world to help in combating the lies of the commissars about the Hungarian revolt. From Poland to China, entire groups of writers had to be reprimanded for their 'incorrect attitude to the Hungarian counter-revolution'. Latvian, Russian and North-Vietnamese writers refused to spread the Great Lie. They ridiculed the idea that a 'handful of Fascists and imperialist agents' could organise an uprising which could only be crushed by some fourteen Soviet divisions. They wrote ironical pieces about the 'forty thousand bishops and aristocrats' of the Csepel Steel Plant who were the last to give up resistance. They ridiculed the idea that the most complete nationwide general strike in history could be instigated by a small reactionary group. They had a ready answer for Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader, when he accused the

Irodalmi Ujsag and the Hungarian writers of 'destroying the Party in demented frenzy'. They stated—and were reprimanded for it—that the Hungarian CP had been destroyed by the insanely murderous terror régime of Stalin and Rakosi. There was not a single country in the Communist world where some or indeed all writers were not threatened by grave reprisals for their 'incorrect stand on Hungary'.

Western writers had to take action too. On June 20, 1957 two young writers, Joseph Gali and Gyula Oberschovszky, were sentenced to death. Gali, a twenty-seven-year-old writer, wrote a drama, *Hill of Liberty*, dealing with the execution of an innocent man, which was a great success in 1956. During the revolution, Gali and Oberschovszky edited the daily newspaper of revolutionary youth, *Igazsag* (Truth). After the suppression of the revolution they wrote and distributed leaflets protesting against those who had besmirched the revolution.

Hungarian writers and students who had fled their homeland besought intellectuals and heads of government in the free world to do everything possible to save the lives of the two young writers. In the next few days the Soviet puppet Kadar régime in Hungary was flooded with cables of protest urging them to spare their lives. Writers such as Jules Romains, Georges Duhamel, Albert Camus, François Mauriac, Jean-Paul Sartre, J. B. Priestley, Stephen Spender, Ignazio Silone, scientists of the rank of Bertrand Russell and Julian Huxley, artists such as Pablo Picasso and even the well-known French Communist writer Louis Aragon cabled to Budapest. The President of Peru was moved to protest. On June 25, the Budapest régime announced that the sentence of the two writers had been suspended. A few days later, the Supreme Court commuted Gali's sentence to fifteen years and that of Oberschovszky to life imprisonment.

Thus the public indignation of the civilised world had saved two lives for the time being. But many of Hungary's best and most popular writers were still in the Secret Police prison in Budapest undergoing preparation for their impending trial.

In the summer of 1957 the leaders of Hungarian intel-

lectual life visited the then Minister of the Interior, Ferenc Munnich, to protest against the imprisonment of the country's best writers. Munnich produced in answer a letter written in prison by the sixty-year-old poet Zoltan Zelk in which he declared that 'October was a glorious national uprising and not a foreign-inspired counter-revolution'. Munnich said this letter proved that Zelk was 'incorrigible'.

In the May 5, 1956 issue of *Irodalmi Ujsag* (*Literary Gazette*) Zelk had written the following poem:

HOW CAN I BE BRAVE?

I am not worthy of praise.
Believe me, my friends, it chills my bones
When you praise my courage.

I am not a tiger; I am a human being.
My worn heart is a nest of fears.
Believe me: I am frightened. I am frightened.

I am a human being, I live like a human being.
How can I be brave?
I fear only that I may be unworthy.
Of this I am more afraid than of death.

The commissars took the lesson of the Gali-Oberschovszky case to heart and the death sentence on another young writer, Gabor Foldes, was announced only after his execution. A few months later the leading writers Tibor Dery, Gyula Hay, Zoltan Zelk and Tibor Tardos were sentenced to nine, six, three and one and a half years in prison respectively.

In 1958 when Premier Imre Nagy and General Pal Maleter were executed, their fate was shared by the writers Miklos Gimes and Joseph Szilagyi. Two writer-publicists, Istvan Bibo and Geza Losonczy, who were ministers in the revolutionary Imre Nagy government, were also arrested. Geza Losonczy, according to an official announcement, died in prison while his case was being investigated. Istvan Bibo was sentenced to life imprisonment. Bibo is the author of the famous memorandum,

written *after* the suppression of the revolution, in which he proposed a compromise solution. Bibo's writings since 1945 have aroused the sympathy not only of advocates of a 'third way' between capitalism and Communism but also of all those who hold that compromise and conciliation are the best means of solving international problems. The passages of his memorandum, which according to his indictment had to be punished by life imprisonment, are quoted below:

> 'Hungary's present situation deals a body-blow to all proponents of the "Third Road" policy. Those countries, groups and individuals—India and other politically responsible Asian nations, all Socialist and Social-Democratic Parties and many other political groups—believe that a world divided between capitalist and Communist ideologies is a world fighting phantoms and creating artificial problems. Amidst these phantoms stands the prejudice shared by orthodox capitalists and Communists alike: that Socialism, i.e., a society free of exploitation, cannot be achieved without first discarding Western concepts of freedom for a long period of time. . . .
>
> 'The entire structure of freedom, which makes the Western world so humane and preferable despite its shortcomings—separation of powers, free elections in a multi-party system, human rights, particularly freedom of the press and public opinion, judiciary independence and a constitutional State—is not merely a "bourgeois" superstructure. It is simply an objective technique, the most highly developed and superior technique of freedom.
>
> 'Stalin and his followers killed the popular front by adopting it, for they considered their lip-service to it merely a tactical trick to divide the allegedly united "monopolist-capitalist enemy". Their aim was to use every means to subvert the popular front from within and then (as their actions in Central and Eastern Europe prove) liquidate it at the first opportunity. As a result, a world-wide popular front policy, the co-operation of the powers which had defeated Fascism,

became impossible. It was proved once again that a philosophical system based only on power and will precludes co-existence, and, on an international political level, this means the inevitability of war.

'The peaceful co-existence of the most diverse political, social and economic systems is possible, but *not among partners who do not share a belief in certain basic moral principles.*'

* * *

Throughout 1958 and 1959 those writers who were not forbidden to publish (160 writers and journalists had been blacklisted by the Party) were and are constantly attacked for going on silence strike, or escaping into the past—writing historical novels and plays—or for their 'revisionist tendencies'.

POLAND

When the vultures of abstraction pick out our brains,
When students are enclosed in textbooks without windows,
When language is reduced to thirty incantations,
When the lamp of imagination is extinguished,
When good people from the moon deny us our taste—
Then truly oblivion is dangerously near.—*from 'Poem for Adults', by Adam Wazyk, 'Nowa Kultura', August 21, 1955.*

Poland lived for more than a hundred years, till 1918, under German, Austrian and Russian occupation. It was the writers of the dismembered and enslaved country who kept the spirit of the oppressed nation alive until liberation. Poets, like Mickiewicz, were regarded as 'the conscience of history', as 'prophets of liberation'.

After twenty years of freedom, the Second World War came and with it the horrors of Hitlerite occupation which were terminated only when Poland was turned into a colony of Stalin's empire. Czarist Russia occupied the main part and the heart of Poland during the century of foreign domination; and Russia, the traditional enemy,

again became the despot of the Polish nation and tried to impose Communist ideology on the people. Even many Polish Communists feared Stalinist occupation, since most of the Polish Communist leaders had been previously executed by Stalin on trumped-up charges. For all these and many other reasons, the initial Communist oppression in Poland was fiercer than in most countries of the Communist world.

The commissars had to wage a long, consistent and fierce campaign to silence and subdue the Polish writers, to isolate them from world literature, to turn them into obedient phrase-mongers and ode-singers. Their campaign was, on the whole, a gigantic failure, although they had partial and temporary successes. During the thaw period there were many recantations of recantations. The 'old writer' about whom Jastrun wrote in 1957, was by no means an isolated example:

> 'An old writer, gone grey in the dangerous game of saving his skin—he who knows the hellish depths of fear, of compromise, of self-degradation—simulates a young man, concerned about the loftiest ideals of mankind.'—*'Przeglad Kulturalny', September 19, 1957.*

Some idea of the terror-atmosphere which surrounded Polish writers can be formed from the well-documented case of Wojciech Bak, one of the outstanding poets of the non-Communist resistance movement during the Second World War. Bak took little part in active politics after the war and as he was an opponent of the régime, which made it impossible for him to write, he applied for permission to leave the country. The régime found it awkward to refuse his request and Bak applied to the Italian Consulate for a visa. The favourable reply to his request was, however, intercepted by the Security Police and the Stalinist leaders of the Polish Writers' Union were instructed to apply for his detention in a lunatic asylum.

Bak described his monstrous persecution in a letter published in the March 2, 1957 issue of the Poznan paper, *Tygodnik Zachodny*. In 1952, after applying for the Italian visa, he was arrested:

'I was lured to the Poznan Council where two doctors forcibly and illegally ordered my confinement in the Dzienkanka [Institute for Nervous Diseases] without notifying my family. . . . I was forced to remain there for several months. What is more, an attempt was made to declare me mentally deficient, under protest made from my family. At the hospital I was unable to get in touch with a lawyer.'

In April 1953 he was released but the Prosecutor applied at once to the Supreme Court to have him reconfined as mentally deficient. 'My life was changed into a nightmare,' he wrote. 'I was constantly called to appear in the Provincial Court.'

Attempts were made to deprive him of his home and to confiscate his library. When these attempts failed, chiefly because of the resistance of his family and some of his friends, he was falsely accused of various crimes. The Prosecutor-General's motion to confine him in a lunatic asylum was dropped in July 1956, but he was informed of this decision only four months later, in November.

The newspaper demanded 'a final and public explanation' of this persecution and added:

'Since for years Wojciech Bak has expressed himself categorically in favour of leaving the country we believe that matters should be arranged according to his wishes, for in our opinion there are no basic reasons why anyone should be forced to remain in a country against his will.'

An excerpt from a poem by Wojciech Bak:

Those who hit you have hit me,
By those who insult you, I have been insulted—
My breath will breathe in your lungs,
The stream of my blood will flow with yours.

And each blow that falls upon you,
Descends with hatred upon my back,
And this same era has lashed me, too,
And this same treason has eaten through my heart.

And our blood pulses in one united flow,
Our voices become as one and begin to rise.
Within me there is daily rising wrath,
In your cities and your towns this seething fury lies.

And sad is the murmur of trees and bitter the pavement
Of martyred cities, prisons and stockades—
It echoes the cry of mothers and terror of anxiety—
And the grief of hearts held by chains.

And when defeat follows upon defeat
My angry voice believes in victory unbounded—
Those who hit you have hit me,
By those who insult you—I have been insulted.

And if I fall to die a martyr's death,
Within your victory I shall be given mine—
And each day the song of wrath beats louder,
Each day my heroism is more triumphant!

(Written in 1952, published in *Tygodnik Zachodny*, March 2, 1957.)

* * *

Oblivion seemed dangerously near even for such writers as Adam Wazyk. Through the long years of terror and misery the commissars did their best to impose the Stalinist pattern on Polish culture. Literary periodicals were either killed outright or regimented into conformist mediocrity. But after Stalin's death, when the commissars' stranglehold on cultural life was becoming less fierce, the miraculous revival of Polish literature astonished the world. It was astonishing not so much because of the daring with which the writers attacked the commissars but because it soon became evident that even under great stress nothing of the vitality and genius of the Polish people had been lost.

During the first two thaw years, writers were naturally mostly engaged in clearing away the debris of the Stalinist period and in fighting for the reassertion of the freedom and dignity of man. With these activities they contributed greatly to the political thaw and to the blood-

less Polish revolution of October 1956. But they also exploited the relaxation of controls to set and achieve high artistic standards. For years they had had to write as if Kafka and Proust and Joyce never existed. And yet during the thaw it became immediately evident that Polish writing was in step with world literature.

In this essay, however, our main interest is in *engaged* literature—literature committed to fight against Party direction, engaged in exposing the real situation. Here, naturally, poems, short stories, literary essays and articles of publicists took the lead. The famous anthology of poems published in Warsaw in 1956, *Hot Ashes*, and the hundreds of 'resistance poems' published in the many literary periodicals were the boldest. Their high artistic standard cannot be fully conveyed from translation, but even these nevertheless give an impression of the literary uprising which was not only a revolt in content but also a 'revolt of *niveau*'. Two specimens:

COMING OUT OF PRISON

by Mieczyslav Jastrun*

In that time
Each day the sun staggered across the vault,
The stars hovered,
From small rooms thick with stench
Alcohol gushes,
Music pours from the radio
And smacking the window, runs into the street.
They stuttered: Marx Engels justice . . .
They stuttered: Holy Father said . . .
They stuttered: flicks bargains Jesumaria . . .

In that time
He was woken from sleep
Blinded by a searchlight,
Drowned in water,
His fingers broken—
Until his body became so light and transparent
That one could see his spirit
Curled like an embryo in its mother's womb.

* Jastrun spent five years in prison under sentence of death.

Suddenly an unknown warder opened the door,
With his dead wife's features
*And his son's eyes.**
He heard the blare of trumpets. He saw the angels of Sodom.

(From *Hot Ashes*, an anthology, Warsaw 1956.)

QUESTIONS OF A PARTY MAN

excerpt by Wiktor Woroszylski

The Party is an undefiled well.
Does this mean
I need no longer wash?
The Party is mighty rock,
Am I then one grain of dust
damned to inaction?
The Party is the mind of our class.
Am I then to have nothing
under my scalp?
The Party is ultimate voice.
Am I only a trembling
mute membrane?

The Party is ultimate authority.
Must I, a shoemaker,
ask the Central Committee
how to make shoes?
Must I, a gardener,
ask how to tend apple and cherry trees?
Must I, a musician,
explain the dancing notes in my head?
The Party is right.
Is he who stands at the top of the hierarchy
always right?
The Party is monolith.
Am I a renegade
every time I doubt?

* * *

The bloodless Polish revolution preceded the Hungarian revolt by some days. The resistance fighter and

* They died while he was in prison.

Communist leader Gomulka, arrested in 1951 and released at the end of 1954, became First Secretary of the Polish CP and proclaimed his anti-terror New Course on October 21, 1956. Actually the Hungarian demonstration which sparked the revolt in Hungary was organised to demonstrate solidarity with Gomulka's Poland.

While Polish writers exploited in at least as great degree the possibilities of the post-Stalin era as any of their colleagues in other countries, the most remarkable thing in their case was their desperate rearguard action against the reimposition of Party discipline on literature. Not only did they resist in a most determined manner all attempts to curtail their recently won liberties, but they opened fire on Socialist realism and sharply criticised the conformist Soviet writers and the Soviet cultural scene. The tone of their writing can be gauged, for instance, from an article by K. T. Toeplitz in *Nowa Kultura* (September 1, 1957) on his recent visit to Moscow:

> 'I saw a strange play by Pogodin, called *The Aristocrats* in the Mayakovsky Theatre.... The heroes of the play are the functionaries of the Cheka (Secret Police); its theme is the process of creation of "new men" in a forced labour camp. Meyerhold, the Soviet director of genius, staged the play. It was first performed in 1937. A year later Meyerhold was arrested, and after two years, killed. In 1956 he was finally rehabilitated. Good Chekists are again educating, on the stage, the "new man". I would prefer to see on the stage of the Mayakovsky Theatre a new Soviet play on the tragedy of Meyerhold.'

The same issue of this magazine reported a barely realised aspect of the Soviet literary scene, typical also of other countries of the orbit—*that silenced writers have audiences*:

> 'Martynov has not had for many years the possibility of appearing in print. But he did not give up poetry. He wrote for himself and for his friends. On his fiftieth birthday his readers organised for him an evening of poetry reading. The auditorium was overflowing. It became obvious that Martynov's unpublished poems

were familiar to a wide public. Similarly with Boris Pasternak. When now and again, on such an evening, he forgot a word, while reciting his poems, *the audience prompted him.*'

It was in Poland that the banning of a weekly caused quite serious riots. This was *Po Prostu*, the organ of university students and young writers. It was one of the leading organs of the post-Stalin thaw and had been in the forefront of the movement which led to Gomulka's resumption of power. From then on, it acted as the firm defender of the achievements of the bloodless revolution and withstood attempts to reintroduce Party guidance.

The authorities first forced its editor-in-chief to resign and in July and September 1957 the weekly went on a forced 'vacation'. The September issue was returned by the censorship to be 'toned down'. The re-written issue was, however, still too rebellious to be circulated and the October issue was also banned and *Po Prostu* permanently suppressed. Protests against the ban led to street riots for four days in Warsaw, beginning on October 3. Similar disturbances were reported from Cracow, Lodz and other Polish cities. The rioters were attacked by the militia with batons and tear gas. Many were injured, scores were detained by the police and ten members of the editorial board of the weekly were expelled from the Party.

The Polish writers, undiscouraged by these events, planned to bring out a new literary monthly, *Europa*. It was due to appear on November 1, 1957 but was banned by the censor after the first issue had been set up. Some members of its editorial board, among them Wazyk, Andrejewski and Pavel Hertz, resigned from the Party.

All through 1958 the fight went on between the writers and commissars in Poland. Anton Slonimski, the chairman of the Polish Writers' Union, one of the most distinguished poets, left no one in doubt about his own stand: *Nowa Kultura* (August 17, 1958) published a poem of his which since then has raised echoes all over the Communist world:

Lying

Lying—the fifth element
(the phrase is Leonardo's)
Taking the form of printer's ink
Oozes from the daily columns
On to roofs of houses, tar of streets.
Apparently nothing has changed,
Only that the official's face has gained a grimace,
Only that I am sitting alone at the table
Looking at staircases without banisters,
Which lead nowhere.
Plucked strings remain mute.

In October 1958 Marek Hlasko, one of the most popular young writers, winner of the 1958 State Prize for literature, defected to the West after the Polish authorities refused to extend his passport. He was in West Germany when this decision was taken.

In December 1958 the Congress of the Writers' Union passed a resolution protesting against the increasing censorship which had recently prevented some thirty books from appearing. The resolution called for a 'defence of the freedom of expression'. During the preceding deliberations the poet M. Jastrun complained that the censors were 'confiscating not only the thunder but also the clouds'.

The Polish authors, like all other writers in the orbit, were attacked during this period as 'revisionists of literature'. To this, in the name of all writers, Victor Woroszylski gave the following answer in *Zycie Literackie* (No. 39, 1958):

> 'The term "revisionism in literature" presupposes the existence of a permanent and unchanging model of literature, a deviation from which is something reprehensible. To accept this is to abolish from the outset the possibility of creating literature. That should be obvious. I do not take such reproaches too tragically.

Things change, and there is a chronic tendency for such threatening assessments to become obsolete. After all, it is not so long ago that the authors who were previously regarded as revisionists and deviationists were rehabilitated and their works saw daylight again.'

The official *Trybuna Ludu* sharply attacked the Congress and the writers who 'after fourteen years of people's rule are still unable to find their place . . . in the work of laying the foundations of the new system'. They are full of 'misgivings and imaginary apprehensions'.

* * *

Not surprisingly, the Czechoslovak and Bulgarian writers behaved in a similar manner. Below we give only a few examples.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

From the Party Central Committee resolution, June 1957:

'In our arguments and conflicts with some writers, the issue is primarily to make clear certain political and ideological questions; such as their relation to the Communist Party and its policy; their relation to the dictatorship of the proletariat, their view of freedom. *. . . The Czechoslovak Writers' Union cultivates some sort of a silent and wary unity of writers.*'

Also a Journalist

by Jaromir Horec

(*Kveten*, February, 1957)

It used to be a good custom
that a journalist knew how to write.
But today he receives a decoration
for being a good official;
and writing—how shall I put it?—
is a bourgeois relic.

A Fairy Tale

by Frantisek Nechvatal

(*Host do Domu*, Brno, April, 1957)

From time immemorial, from time to time,
barbarians invade the country.
The people's temple is ravished by fratricide
and merchants haggle there.
The rulers are always infallible
and become tyrants.
Crime fornicates in their palaces
and a lie lounges in its own easy chairs.
They want to lull the people to a trance
and lead it as a ram is led.
But the people has its memory for wounds,
its tortured soul silent.
Flung into fetters by treason,
it will shake its head like a giant.
It will nourish its soul with word
and drink in the virgin forest.
Let their trumpeting mouthpieces squeal,
let lies and deceit gush from their mouths.
The people will rip itself back from disaster
and let freedom grow in glory.

'Hardly anyone would regard the present state of Czech fiction as satisfactory.... Conscious, sharp and concrete social criticism is the greatest and most important achievement of the literature hammered out during the last century and the beginning of ours.... Those were bitter pills which Zola or Anatole France served to the French or Gogol and Gorky to the Russians. ..We feel that the need is growing for a good, critical novel on the ideas, morals and character of a Czech of the past forty years. If we view the crop of fiction of the years after World War II until today from this angle, it seems to us that our literature, rather than approaching this important function, drifted away from it.... A word of deliverance, strong and lasting, will be said by him who writes ... a true picture of a man

of today.'—*Jan Trefulka in 'Novy Zivot', Prague, January 1958.*

The Slovak Writers' Union monthly, *Slovenske Pohlady* (Bratislava, No. 3, 1958), published answers to a questionnaire on Slovak literature during the Communist era sent to the leading writers. Some extracts:

> 'Why doesn't our prose reach the standards of the year 1900? . . . Contemporary works . . . are constructed in a dry rational way, there is no inspiration in them. . . . The thinking of the majority of writers is provided with such an armour of internal control that, so to speak, every bold artistic vision is suppressed and replaced with some kind of schematism' (Pavel Buncak).

> 'During this relatively short period, literature was harmed most by the naive conviction that all truth has already been discovered and the only thing now to be done is to write on given themes, seeing to it that the work should be ideological and masterfully written' (Zora Josenska).

> 'Works were . . . for the main part schematically constructed; they replaced real life with a belletristic treatment of *a priori* postulates and they involved the requirement to describe the conflicts of life and man by eliminating and concealing these conflicts as far as possible' (Jan Rozner).

BULGARIA

In Todor Genov's play, *Fear*, an actor recites the following verses before the curtain:

Lead me, Party, lead me. I am ready to sacrifice all,
Send me abroad, if you wish, even there I will answer your call,
I am your son, and if you wish you may make me a minister,
With flowers I will adorn every home, happy days will flow,
Only give me an office and a throne and I will repay you a hundredfold.

Reading this it was painfully obvious to everyone that this was a parody of a paean *To the Party*, by Khristo Radevski, a Party stooge. The Party press, attacking Genov, also emphasises this fact. In the play the hero looks at a Communist functionary and says:

> 'Modest, good-natured, nice—to some, jokes; to some, favours; to others a gift of nylon stockings from Paris. A big, watching spider! ... Forgive me. *You and I are caught in a spider's web. Let us see who will get us out. ... This spider's web is the Central Committee ...'*—*'Teater', Sofia, January, 1957.*

The editor-in-chief and the drama critic of *Teater* were condemned for publishing and favourably reviewing Genov's play.

In Pavel Vezhinov's play *My Secret (Septemviri*, December 1956) one of the characters says: 'The most perfect morality is that which least constrains people and offers them the greatest opportunity of being free and happy.'

The famous novels of the Bulgarian 'thaw' were Emil Manov's *An Unauthentic Case* and Lyuben Stanev's *The Laskov Family*. P. Nesnakomov's story *The Benefactors* describes the exploitation of the poor by the rich in Communist society. These and plays and short stories by many other writers mirrored the contemporary Bulgarian scene without varnishing and without hiding the negative aspects. They were, naturally, denounced as slanderers, rotten individualists and their works, poisonous weeds, an expression borrowed from China.

One of the leading Communist writers of Bulgaria. Stoyanov, announced the heretical thesis that art should be independent of Party politics. Boris Delchev maintained that the Socialist realism has nothing to do with revolutionary realism.

The Party's counter-attack was met by a silence strike. The October 17, 1957 issue of *Literaturen Front* attacked the 'irreconcilable writers':

> 'It is not a question of writers being passive and aloof, or of private reasons, but of exploiting silence

as a means of opposing Party views on literature. These writers are not really silent at all; on the contrary, they are very talkative and "heroic" when they speak from their own rostrums.'

In January 1958 the Party attacked literary revisionism as a Western plot against the Soviet bloc, under 'the old, ragged banner of the notorious "freedom of the writer" ' and 'the aestheticism and ideologically empty lyrics of the revisionists'. (*Vecherny Noviny*, Sofia, January 17, 1958.)

All through 1958 and in the first half of 1959, many Bulgarian writers were still being reprimanded for their revisionism.

ROUMANIA

In Roumania, where oppression was from the outset far more vehement than in any of the other East European countries, writers were reprimanded by the Party because of their 'evasionism', 'escape into the past', 'escape into non-political subjects', 'abstract aestheticism' and 'withdrawal into silence'. After the XXth Party Congress in Moscow in February and the Hungarian revolution in October 1956, the Roumanian writers gave up their 'evasionist' tactics and went over to direct attack. This is the conclusion one has to draw from the series of 'self-criticisms' and recantations published by all the literary periodicals in Roumania.

> 'Modernist, aesthetical [*sic*] conciliatory, eclectic objectivist tendencies aimed at paralysing the Party and endorsing diversionist activities could be detected . . . in *Gazeta Literara, Tribuna, Steaua, Utunk, Neue Literatur* and especially in the No. 4 issue of *Viata Romineasca.'—(Party theoretical periodical 'Luceafarul', January 1, 1959.)*

Utunk and *Neue Literatur* are literary reviews of the Hungarian and German minorities. They have been attacked for spreading 'harmful, chauvinistic and nationalist ideas'.

The seventy-year-old Todor Arghezi, perhaps the greatest living Roumanian poet, in a recent radio lecture praised Saint Augustine as 'a man of great culture for his time; he wrote that *he feared people who in their entire life read only one book*'.

We must get out of the arid, barren pastures of a certain doctrine of art which has weighed down the light feet of the Muses and clipped the wings of Pegasus.—*Gustav Just, now in prison, in 'Sonntag', October 10, 1957.*

It is time to re-open the question of so-called artistic freedom, of so-called objectivity which lacks principles, of tolerance versus partisanship. . . . Why do so many writers grimace when they speak the words 'Socialist realism'?—*Kurt Bartels at the 32nd plenum of the East German Writers' Union, July 1957.*

I have seen quite a number of the new East German plays. I am not so stupid or so inexperienced, and neither are those present in this room, that we cannot see how bad these plays are. . . . The young dramatists of today are not less talented than the young dramatists whose works were so frequently performed during the 1920s. *There seems to be something wrong here,* and I will say quite frankly that the situation seems to be *less satisfactory than it was in the 1920s.—Alexander Abusch, Deputy Minister of Culture, at the theatrical directors' conference, April 1957.*

We do not recognise an art which does not have a Party point of view.—*Wolfgang Langhoff, Director of the Deutsches Theater, East Berlin, April 1957.*

4
The Experiment in East Germany

THE laboratory experiment in establishing full dictatorship over literature is being conducted in East Germany in circumstances which make its results peculiarly enlightening. East Germany—or as the Communists call it the German Democratic Republic—forms one-third of the divided German nation. Unlike the other Communist-run countries, East Germany is not hermetically sealed off from the normal world. Through the divided capital, Berlin, nearly one-quarter of the adult population has escaped to the West. The German Communist régime suffered and is suffering the heaviest losses in university professors and students, in physicians, teachers, engineers, writers and artists. The lack of complete isolation and the fact that there is no language barrier between the two Germanys make the German Communist régime particularly vulnerable to the effect of the free cultural climate in Western Germany. Although everything was and is being done by the Communists to reduce cultural contact between the two Germanys to the minimum, the effect of existing contacts shows that Communist régimes cannot afford to permit free cultural exchange with the rest of the world.

* * *

The situation of East German writers and artists differed in one important respect from that of their colleagues in other Communist-run countries. They were practically free to choose between the two parts of their divided nation. And there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of those writers who, instead of escaping to the West, tried to contribute to the 'moral rejuvenation and

reform of Communism'. (Most of them are in prison or in exile now.)

Last, but not least, during the Hitler epoch in Germany a large number of Leftish writers became Communists or sympathisers. In the writings of Berthold Brecht, Anna Seghers, Willi Bredel, Bernhard Kellermann, Hans Fallada and others one can study the effect of Party direction of literature. Comparing Anna Seghers' *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara* or *Das Siebte Kreuz*, written before the Party assumed full dictatorship, with the more recent *Der Mann und sein Name*, or studying Willi Bredel's trilogy *Verwandte und Bekannte*, the first volume of which was written abroad, the last two in Communist Germany, one cannot escape the impression that the fine fervour of feeling, the revolutionary passion and the human optimism of the earlier works, have been lost since the author came under Party direction.

True conviction and commitment seems to be lacking also in the post-1945 writings of Brecht, at least in those of his works which he was permitted to publish. There is a general decline in artistic achievement. This impression gained by Western students of German literature is widely shared by German Communist writers, literary historians and even Party functionaries.

The East German experiment illustrates furthermore the truth of a saying by Willy Haas: *'It is not the dogma which spoils the poet but the representatives of the dogma.'* The Communist and sympathiser writers of the artistically brilliant Weimar era (1919–32) were most certainly 'dogma-ridden'. The ballads and songs of Bertholt Brecht, for instance, were inspired by a simple, schoolboyish faith in the holy books of Marx and Engels. The lyric poet Johannes R. Becher had a burning Communist conviction. The Communist playwrights of the Weimar period were at least as true Communists as Calderon was Catholic; and like Calderon they produced dramas of high artistic standard although they were intent on 'spreading the faith'.

The poet in Johannes R. Becher was killed when he came under the dictatorship in literature of the managers of dogma, those non-artists who had become functionaries

directing art, insensitive and irreverent commissars who tried to put strait-jackets of conformism on art and literature. They tried to impose a crudely propagandistic content on the writers and a style and form of writing pleasing to their primitive philistine tastes. While labelling as 'petty bourgeois' everything which deviated in style from the usual Marxist verbiage, they tried to force a style on the writers which was, in fact, uncouth and petty bourgeois. It was not enough to praise the régime; the commissars tried to prescribe *how* it should be praised.

This interference with style, and the disillusionment caused by the effects of the terror-régime, shook the writers' faith in dogma and strangled the artist in them. The deterioration was obvious and very painful as writers could not help remembering the brilliance of the Weimar past.

Professor Hans Meyer, the literary historian, in two of his lectures on the state of East German literature in 1956, looked back nostalgically to the wealth of original creative output during the 1914–33 period and compared the riches of those years with the poverty of the present literary scene in East Germany. He deplored the growing tendency to assume that intrinsically bad literature could nevertheless have its uses and attacked the Stalinist view that writers are engineers of the human soul. It is impossible, he said, to draw an analogy between technology and literary work. 'The human soul is not a thing on which an engineer can be set to work.'

He attributed the weakness of contemporary East German literature to a number of causes, but especially to the failure to treat the arts quite separately from politics and the sciences, and to the subjugation of the arts to topical expediency. He demanded free discussion of contemporary literature—of bourgeois as well as non-bourgeois literature—and emphasised that if the literary climate was to improve it must be permissible to discuss literature in its widest scope. 'The study of Kafka must no longer be a dark secret, nor interest in Faulkner and Thornton Wilder illegal activity.'

Professor Meyer was severely reprimanded for these

views, although the editor of *Neue Deutsche Literatur* came to his defence. 'No one knows better,' he wrote, 'than the editor of a literary journal that we are living in lean years.... And when a literary historian ... puts his finger on the wound and seeks for the cause, he ought not to be accused of pessimism.'

* * *

Germany before the Hitler era led the theatrical world. German dramatists, directors and stage-designers represented much of the *avant-garde* in that period. East Germany could have drawn on this rich heritage and on the stimulating presence of such masters as Brecht and other excellent Communist dramatists. Yet under Party direction there was a general atrophy of East German drama.

The theatrical journal of the Communist Party, *Theater der Zeit*, in the leading article of the March 1957 issue revealed that *of sixty-four new plays by East German dramatists presented in the past two years, forty-three were performed only once.* A few were given two or three performances, but only five were shown as many as five times and *none achieved a longer run.* The editorial complained that since the XXth Congress of the Soviet CP:

> 'Everybody talked about Giraudoux, Anouilh, Gide, Wilder, Faulkner and *many West German dramatists.* ... The famous slogan of Mao Tse-tung (Let a hundred flowers bloom) is much misused in order to encourage unrestricted liberalism.... But the pessimism of a Samuel Becket, of a Tennessee Williams, or the formal trifles of many mediocre playwrights of the western world are of small interest ... and the social comedies of an Anouilh and a Cocteau are only of interest provided our own modestly blossoming flowers are cultivated and given preference over them.'

This complaint, presumably directed at the theatre-going public, had naturally no effect, especially after the Deputy Minister of Culture, Abusch, had emphasised how bad the 'modestly blossoming' East German flowers were.

* * *

The treatment of writers by the East German commissars followed the usual Communist pattern. Frosts and thaws followed each other. After the series of risings in the summer of 1953 in East Berlin, Magdeburg, Halle, Leipzig and other places, a 'New Course' was adopted. The *Kulturbund* announced on July 7, 1953:

> 'The Cultural League is working for freedom of opinion to be guaranteed in all discussions among scientists and artists. . . . Administrative interference by State authorities in the creative problems of art and literature must cease. . . . Press and radio should in future assure that the public receives truthful information.'

Four days later the East German Academy of Arts published a revolutionary suggestion, namely that it should be consulted before the Government made any laws or regulations concerning art.

In his speech to the Central Committee of the Party, Premier Grotewohl promised that certain impediments to creative art would be removed in the future. He admitted that responsibility for artistic creation had centred on Party and State 'to the point of omnipotence'. He promised 'that the rude and wounding conduct, frequently wrong, of individual Party and State officials towards artists and their work' would end.

But when the first shock of the risings was over, the concessions promised in the confusion were soon abandoned. On October 29 Grotewohl announced: 'Our State . . . cannot renounce its claim to direction' of the arts and literature.

The writers' reaction to the end of the short thaw was so strong that the Fourth Writers' Congress which was to open in May 1954 had to be indefinitely postponed, and was held only in January 1956.

In 1955 Dr. Wilhelm Girnus, a leading Party functionary, attacked the writer Walter Victor for his heretical view that *inherent talent played a larger part in an author's work than his ideological loyalty*. According to Dr. Girnus, ideological clarity and faith was a predominant factor in the creation of 'Socialist' works of art.

To this the national prize-winning writer Kurt Stern answered that although Thomas Mann did not possess the degree of ideological knowledge necessary for East German writers, yet he produced masterpieces.

Before the Writers' Congress in January 1956, Dr. Girnus stated in the official *Neues Deutschland* that knowledge and grasp of Marxism-Leninism is more important in literary creation than original talent. Dr. Girnus then made faintly veiled threats to writers who 'fear that ideological clarity might impair the emotional and spiritual forces which go into the making of a work of art'.

At the Congress, Willi Bredel, a life-long Communist and one of the leading writers of East Germany, answered Dr. Girnus in these words:

> 'Does he believe that when we hear this language, reminiscent of a teacher fond of caning, we shall immediately mend our ways and tackle the next job brim full with enthusiasm? What sort of behaviour is this? I should like to ask by what right such things are being said and written, for all to hear and read?'

Walter Victor reported on the Congress in *Junge Welt* (January 13, 1956):

> 'The form in which the hoped-for final freeing of the new type of German literature from the incubus of scholasticism and from the threat of the raised forefinger took place . . . was most gratifying. . . . As our Willi Bredel . . . found fault with the dourness, the intolerance, the superior attitude of Dr. Girnus, as he disposed of all the coldly intellectual handling of the conception of ideology as foreign to art and passionately pledged himself . . . to a life as a writer of sincerity and understanding, the effect on the congress was one of relief. . . . The congress had seen the Banner of Art unfolding above it.'

Two days later Ludwig Renn, the novelist and Party functionary, gave the Party's answer. He simply quoted the recent Central Committee resolution which demanded that writers and artists should thoroughly master Marxism-Leninism. Renn concluded:

'If Walter Victor unfurls the "banner of art", we shall take the liberty of raising the banner of the Party over culture and everything else.'

The next short letting-up came after the XXth Congress of the Soviet CP in February 1956. This was the period of great ferment all over the Communist world. The German writers and literary historians made full use of the limited thaw. Professor Meyer's contribution has been already quoted. One of the leading organs of this ferment was *Sonntag*, which published the writings of Polish and Hungarian writers. But after the bloodless revolution in Poland and the great Hungarian uprising, writers and intellectuals again became an obsession with the East German commissars. On November 29, 1956, Professor Wolfgang Harich, editor of the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, was arrested and charged with conspiring to overthrow the régime. With him, or soon afterwards, several writers, publishers, newspaper editors, university lecturers and university students were arrested. The editor of the *Wochenpost*, Martin Bottcher, was purged, the charge being that he had distributed copies of Gomulka's speech to the 8th Plenum of the Polish CP.

Professor Harich, a convinced Communist, anxious to work for the moral rejuvenation of the Party, prepared a memorandum which he tried to deliver to the Central Committee of the Party and which he did deliver to the Soviet Embassy. He was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. A few excerpts from this treasonable memorandum:

'We do not intend to repudiate Marxism-Leninism but to liberate it from Stalinism and dogmatism. . . . We want, in a completely legal manner, to discuss and to realise our ideas inside the Party. Our legality, however, finds its limits when the present Party leadership itself acts illegally. . . . Internal party discussion is being strangled, the press muzzled; working-class discontent is . . . explained as resulting from the work of imperialist agents. . . . We want to reform the Party from inside. . . . The domination of Party members by the Party apparatus must be radically broken. . . . The danger of popular rising in the German Democratic Republic

exists if the Stalinist-Ulbricht group continues in power and the forces of opposition fail to remove the Stalinists from party leadership.'

Harich and his friends demanded freedom of thought and the *'total restoration of the rule of law'*. No more privileges for leading functionaries! Workers' Councils, on the Yugoslav model, in all socialist enterprises!

Harich's treason consisted simply of interpreting too literally the directives of the XXth Party Congress in Moscow on extending democracy and eliminating dogmatism.

* * *

The leading Marxist aesthetician of the Communist world was the Hungarian Professor, George Lukacs. He was in the leadership of the Bolshevik revolution in Hungary in 1919 and then, after a few years in Vienna, he went to the Soviet Union where he worked till 1945.

Professor Lukacs represented the Soviet world at many international meetings of writers and intellectuals. His bulky works were required reading for the Communist *élite*. East German writers were particularly urged to study the works of Lukacs, who wrote in German. But after the Hungarian rising, in which students of Lukacs played some part, the German writers were told to liberate themselves from the unhealthy ideas of Lukacs.

* * *

The new period of oppression in 1957 reduced the East German writers to complete silence. Open criticism ceased. At organised meetings of writers, formal resolutions were passed in support of the Party but the Party leader Ulbricht pleaded in vain with writers and artists that they should be more active. The result of the silence-strike was a very limited 'thaw'. And so the tug-of-war goes on between East German writers and commissars.

The themes and scope of literary works should be unlimited. One may either praise the new society or criticise the old.—*Chang Hen-shui, at the Union of Chinese Writers' Conference, July 15, 1956.*

Opposition to the Communist Party is treason and means the ruin of the country and great calamity for the nation. —*Lung Ting-yi, Propaganda Chief of Cent-Com of the Chinese C.P., July 11, 1957.*

We are against the bourgeois idea of the writers as a special sort of persons, with individual ambition and even against the idea of individual genius.—*Kang Cho, in 'China Youth', September 1, 1957.*

Bourgeois individualism is the source of all evils and the great enemy of Communism. Without doing away with individualism, we cannot build up Communism.—*Liu Ning-yi, President of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, August 8, 1958.*

5
An Eastern Nightmare: China

At the end of the military campaign in 1949 Mao Tse-tung's commissars started their campaign to transform the Chinese people into Communists overnight. Chinese Party resolutions and reports show that the physical liquidation of 'class-hostile elements' and 'old-régime intellectuals' was on a larger scale even than in the USSR or Roumania.

The Communist transformation of the rest of the population was undertaken with the peculiarly Chinese variety of Stalinist terrorism. It was first called (by Secret Police chief Lo Jui-ching) 'the campaign for the suppression of counter-revolutionaries with *fanfare*'. Resistance to Communism—according to Lo Jui-ching—'lay not in the rifles of the guerillas but in millions of hearts'. Hence one of the new slogans was: 'Surrender your hearts!' The police chief announced: 'Two ways are open to all counter-revolutionaries: the way of death, for those who resist, and the way of life for those who confess.... To confess is better than not to confess.'

Han Suyin in *A Many Splendoured Thing* describes the atmosphere of this 'liquidation campaign with fanfare'. Drums beat, loudspeakers boomed, hypno-pedagogics through verbal and written slogans everywhere and always became part of the 'normal' day. Mass-conditioning proceeded apace and there were—and still are—orgies of 'group confessions' of dangerous thoughts and political deviations. In Shanghai the Bund on the Whangpoo river was roped off, roofs of tall buildings were guarded day and night to prevent suicides and people did not dare to walk on the pavements near the skyscrapers for fear of falling bodies.

Shock tactics to convert the masses produced the new

terminology of *menticide* and *thought-control.* Mao's commissars enriched language with their inventions: brainwashing, thought-guidance, 'tail-cutting' (from the old way of life, from family, friends, old values, non-party morality, etc.).

The 'Household Police' and the 'voluntary' transformation and rectification of every citizen made China somewhat similar to a huge police camp where innocent people are made to confess through physical and mental coercion. Extremes of mental and physical fatigue and sustained tension led to the disintegration of personality in some. With these methods, the entire Chinese population were expected to 'cut their tails' and liberate themselves from their traditional way of life, their national culture and character, to become obedient State serfs of the Party dictators.

Mao Tse-tung and his general staff tried to compress the decades of Soviet transformation into as many years. Did they decide on the 'blitzkrieg' methods of making China Communist because of the vastness of the territory and population or because they had to overthrow and eradicate the oldest and one of the most refined cultures in the world? Or again were they already aiming at making Peking the capital of the Communist world, or at least of Asia? We do not know.

Anyhow it took the Soviet dictators sixteen years to establish total dictatorship over literature. 'Transformaion' was complete in 1934. In China this first period was over in 1952, so far as administrative steps were concerned. It had taken barely two years. The administrative steps were very harsh. Hundreds of writers were executed, thousands imprisoned.

All through this time, and even today, China was and is a multi-party state in which several 'democratic' parties exist, provided they accept Communist 'guidance'. Theoretically and in principle the writers were not expected to become Communists. At the same time the Chinese system has retained many elements of the Proletkult-movement which was discarded in the USSR in the nineteen-twenties. The Chinese leadership believes in 'salvation through physical work'. Intellectuals, artists,

writers, scientists were and are being 'remoulded through voluntary physical labour'.

The Chinese second period in literature lasted till the 'Let a hundred flowers bloom!' era in the mid-fifties. During these two periods Chinese writers had less chance of getting non-conformist writings printed than anywhere else in the Communist world during the corresponding periods.

The reaction to the 'hundred flowers' slogan was so great and widespread that it came as a deep shock to the Party dictators. From students to professors, from Communist writers to revered Party theoreticians—thousands of writers and intellectuals started to attack the murderous régime. After the Hungarian revolution this wave of attack and criticism redoubled in force. Tyranny was attacked in open letters. For example: 'A letter to Chairman Mao' by Professor Yang Shih-chan (*Chang Chiang Jih Pao,* July 13, 1957):

> 'Our constitution provides that citizens enjoy freedom of residence and freedom to change residence. In fact, we have not given any of the five hundred million peasants the freedom to change residence to the city. . . . Again, our constitution provides that the freedom of the person of citizens is inviolable. During the campaign for the suppression of counter-revolutionaries in 1955, an untold number of citizens throughout the country were detained. . . . A great many of them died.
>
> *'This is tyranny! This is wickedness. . . .*
>
> 'Under the domination of fanatical sectarianism, our Party has become disgusted with intellectuals, snubbed them, looked upon them with suspicion and distrust. . . . We have applied to intellectuals methods of punishment which peasants would not apply to landlords, or workers to capitalists. The intellectuals who chose to die by jumping from tall buildings, drowning in rivers, swallowing poison, cutting their throats, or by other methods, were innumerable. . . . *Comparing our methods of massacre with that adopted by the Fascists at Auschwitz, the latter appear more clumsy and childish.'*

Newspapers reported the popular enthusiasm for freedom of speech. *Wen Hui Pao,* Shanghai, for instance wrote about the wall newspapers of university students (May 27, 1957):

> 'Not long ago the sounds of spring thunder were only indistinctly heard. But within a few days, all the flowers blossomed overnight.... The first critical bulletin appeared on the wall of the Mess Hall of Peking University on the morning of May 19, followed by another bulletin ... recommending the development of a garden of democracy to develop the campaign for free debate.... The proposal roused enthusiastic response from students. Bulletin after bulletin was posted. Many people consider that the way has been opened for speaking freely....
>
> 'The atmosphere of free debate at once engulfed the whole university.... On the square in front of the Mess Hall, as in Hyde Park, thousands of students were listening to one heated debate after another....'

'Democratic walls' came into being at all universities. On June 27, 1957 the New China News Agency already reported that *'a mad attack has been launched against the Party and socialism'*. A student of the physics department had the audacity to call Marxism an 'obnoxious weed', others suggested that *'the Party Committee be removed from the throne'*. *Jen Min Jih Pao,* the Central Party newspaper, was called 'the Great Wall that shuts out the truth'. Students and professors formed 'Hundred Flowers Societies', the Peking students sent 'so-called *relay batons of democracy* to Tientsin University, Futan University, East China Normal University and other institutions, planning to fan the flame of hatred towards Socialism everywhere'.

The anti-Party attack at Nanking University was simultaneous with that in Peking. The Nanking students demanded that the local newspapers carry reports about their Democratic Wall.

The literary periodicals which opened the attack sooner, but in more reserved tones, were infected by the

popular wave. The blossoming turned into the 'production of poisonous weeds'.

Party headquarters was in a turmoil. Suddenly there seemed to be a united front of intellectuals, workers and peasants against their dictatorship. The Party apparatus is a clumsy giant. The 'hundred flowers' slogan confused the commissars controlling publishing houses, newspapers and periodicals. They found themselves ousted from their rigid censorship position and the censorship machinery started to roll, so to speak, towards relaxation. Even resistance writers managed to get into print. Literature and sociology, journalism and historiography started to give a new picture of recent events and the situation of the people.

During this comparatively brief period of relaxed Party control over verbal and written expression, the Chinese cultural scene resembled a countryside where an enormous dam has burst and flooded everything. The flood of free writing, of free speech, of exposures and criticism took the Party leaders by surprise. It showed that at least the articulate minority of the population was not transformed at all. Brainwashing, indoctrination and emotional disruption had failed utterly. A new and more vigorous rectification campaign had to be introduced, directed primarily against the intellectuals.

* * *

The return to strict Party control was also made necessary by the reaction of writers elsewhere in the Communist world. In the USSR, in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and East Germany writers and intellectuals seized on the Chinese example. The 'hundred flowers' slogan and the 'non-antagonistic contradictions' thesis were seized upon as justifications for the resistance to Party controls. A typical example from the Polish press: 'In regard to ideology, this turning point in China means the abandonment of the old interpretation of Marxism as a sealed and sacred book; a departure from the period when truths were decreed instead of being forged from reality.' (*Sztandar Mlodych*, May 7, 1957.)

In Hungary, Radio Budapest (May 25, 1957) hastened to point out:

> 'The Chinese methods are not correct in all Socialist countries and especially not in every phase. We may add that they are especially incorrect after a recently defeated counter-revolution. . . . It must be kept in mind, also, that the *Chinese comrades after 1949 liquidated the class enemy in a much harder and more consistent way than we did.* Thanks to this . . . the People's democracy is today solid in China; it cannot be shaken, and this is why they can broaden courageously and generously the democracy of the masses.'

The Chinese Communist leaders, however, less sure of the safety of their régime, returned to their but recently abandoned terror methods. In the second half of 1957 the 'all-people rectification' campaign was introduced and the remoulding of intellectuals through voluntary physical labour started. According to a November 26, 1957 broadcast of Radio Peking 810,000 intellectuals were already undergoing physical training. 'The present conception of intellectuals as brain workers of a higher category must be smashed.' They must be told that 'total physical transformation' is facing them.

In July 1957 'the people' were organised to launch one of their usual spontaneous hate and indignation campaigns against the anti-Party intellectuals. The Security Police, the Household Police and the Party functionaries went over to full-scale attack. They herded workers, peasants and university students into mass-meetings which sent open letters and telegrams to Party HQ, demanding the punishment of the class enemy and their stooges. Such an open letter was produced even from the Association of Peking University students, although former resolutions had stated that they were all misled into revolt by the usual handful of reactionaries and imperialist agents.

In July *Jen Min Jih Pao* started to publish the texts of recantations and confessions. Some sample titles of such articles:

'I Bow My Head and Admit My Guilt before the People'
by Chang Po-chun
'A Review of My Mistakes and Crimes'
by Huang Shao-chung
'Request for People's Forgiveness'
by Huang Chi-shiang
'Why Have I Committed Such Serious Errors?'
by Tan Ti-wu
'I Admit My Guilt to the People'
by Fei Hsiao-tung

Professors and university students—according to official reports—became such enthusiastic supporters of the régime under the influence of this campaign that soon 140,000 of them went to do voluntary manual labour in the country, working as unskilled labourers, building dams. The official papers carried also news about such professors and students escaping from the labour camps.

Half of the membership of the Writers' Union (to which all writers must belong) also became voluntary labourers. *Pravda* published a report from Peking (November 20, 1957):

> 'As a result of a reorganisation taking place in the literary journals and organisations of the Chinese Writers' Union, about fifty per cent of the members will be released for work at the grass roots level. Many Chinese writers have already declared their intention of living and working in factories on the land.'

* * *

What happened meanwhile to some of the well-known writers?

The Peking *People's Daily* reported, on August 7, 1957, the unmasking of an anti-Party clique led by the Stalin Prize winner novelist, Ting Ling, and Chen Chi-hsia. This clique allegedly plotted to launch an all-out offensive against the Party at the National Congress of Literary and Art Circles in October. 'The Communist Party insists', wrote the same paper later, 'that literature and art should serve political aims and be subordinated to the tasks of the various revolutionary periods.'

Ting Ling, a veteran Communist and China's foremost woman writer, is the author of the novel *The Sun Shines over the Shangkan River,* for which she received the Stalin Prize in 1953. A Party member since 1931, she astonished the Party leaders by refusing to recant. From the China-wide official denunciation campaign which followed, let one example suffice. *China Youth* (September 1, 1957), under the title *'Liquidate the evil influence of the soul-corroding Ting Ling'*, emphasised that there was general indignation in the country when an author forgets that the 'literary calling is merely a nut in the overall Party machine'.

Ting Ling was deposed from all her functions and elective offices and one of her punishments, or rather one of the attempts to transform this Communist of twenty-five years' standing, was a peculiarly humiliating form of physical labour. She had to scrub the steps and act as charwoman in the Peking Writers' Union building.

The writer Liu Shao-tang, on the other hand, is entirely a product of the new Communist China. He was thirteen years old and a member of the clandestine Communist youth organisation when his village was 'liberated' by the Communist troops. According to the official denunciation, he was until 1954 'rendering the true facts of rural life'. From then on he began to describe peasants as dejected in spirit. 'Worse still, these . . . dejected spirits are produced by our own new society.' The rural situation as described resembled 'the darkest hours of Kuomintang oppression'.

Liu Shao-tang in an article refuted Mao Tse-tung's Yenan pronouncement on art, which was regarded as the artist's catechism. In his *Mist over the Fields* he wrote a vitriolic satire on Party life in a collective farm.

By 1958, hand-in-hand with administrative measures, the campaign against the still recalcitrant writers took a violent form. Revisionist writers who 'hold that the main tasks of literature and the arts are to express the defects of our society' are enemies of the Party and of the people. They are traitors and saboteurs.

Perhaps the most curious 'literary' document of the

Communist world is an open letter issued on March 7, 1958 by the Chinese Writers' Union:

> 'Writers, make big forward leaps! During . . . the great upsurge in big Socialist forward leaps . . . miracles are happening one after another. The miracles that appear in one day can be written up into many poems, plays and novels. . . . Just as we are eager to know how many million tons of steel our country will produce this year, the people want to know how much we writers will turn out this year. We may not like figures, but they are exactly what is needed in the big Socialist leaps. If 10,000 writers planned to turn out ten short pieces in addition to the long ones this year, we would have 100,000 extra pieces.
>
> 'Plans and targets facilitate supervision and allow us to emulate and to criticise each other. Everyone must subject himself to collective supervision. We should include everything in our plans, just as a department store supplies everything. Those who do not write poems must now write them, and soon. We should handle long spears but also wield short clubs. We must turn out something, be it long or short.
>
> 'Once the Writers' Union announces the figures, there is no room for us to retreat. We must go forward with our plans to fulfil and surpass them. Our plans are promises and contracts; we are not allowed to default or else we shall lose the confidence of the people.'

Six months later the Chairman of the Writers' Union reported already on the 'big leap forward' in literature:

'In June, July and August of this year more than twice the number of plays of all kinds were staged than in the corresponding period last year. . . . The number of poems, songs, short stories and novels has doubled.'

While large numbers of writers were imprisoned or were sent to labour camps in order to remould themselves, *Proletkult* had a new orgy. Millions of workers were prompted to start writing from scratch. This was to show that there is no need for writers who are 'more artist than Red', and that if writers strike, workers and peasants will write instead of them.

The *New China News Agency* reported on September 24, 1958:

> 'In the field of literature and art, there is an unprecedented growth of creative work among the working class. . . . In *Sulu-hsien,* Hopei province, half of the country's population of 400,000 is engaged in some form of writing or other artistic creation. There are now creative groups in every village and every family has its writers. They have already produced 1·4 million items, from poetry, ballads and short stories to paintings. . . . 300,000 workers and peasants of Kiangsu province turned out 10 million items in the past six months, Shanghai workers in the three months up to July produced 800,000 pieces.'

The 650 million Chinese were engaged at the same time in a great many enthusiastic voluntary movements, from mass slaughter of sparrows to producing 'items' of literature. During this time some journalists got into trouble for reporting that the working people would like to have their right to eight hours' sleep defended. Production managers criticised the provincial cultural functionaries for encouraging idlers to escape the necessary overtime (unpaid) under the pretext of taking four hours to write four-line verses.

The Peking *People's Daily* (April 21, 1958) published an example of the kind of verse which Chinese poets have been told to write:

My sweetheart is at Hungmeichuang south of the mountain,
I am at Hsinghuatsun north of the mountain.
I want to sing a song for him,
But the mountain stops my voice.
I want to send him a flower,
But the mountain people embarrass me.
This year the co-op unites both sides as one family,
And I can meet him all day and talk to his heart.

* * *

This drive failed to produce the required results. Many of the writers kept silent, others wrote 'unprintable stuff';

others again succeeded in publishing 'pernicious libels on Chinese society'.

Cultural dictator Kuo Mo-jo had to turn against revisionist intellectuals. He announced that patriotic citizens would not tolerate those intellectuals who failed to make the forward leap in their thinking: 'History waits for no man. History disregards sentimentality. The Chinese revolution is the continuation of one revolution into another . . . the self-moulding of intellectuals, too, must be one revolution following another.'

Those reluctant intellectuals who did not see at once that instead of 'history' one should read 'Secret Police' realised soon enough, and in great numbers, that for those for whom history refuses to wait, the Secret Police waits on the doorstep.

New China News Agency pointed out on March 6, 1958 that everybody must *'love what the Party loves and hate what the Party hates'*.

Those writers who escaped forced labour camps and prison saw their incomes cut. The *People's Daily* reported on October 5, 1958 that the publishers in Peking had followed the example of the Shanghai publishers in lowering by 50 per cent the royalties paid to writers. The prospect of financial reward caused writers 'to develop the bourgeois individualist idea of seeking fame and pecuniary gain and promote the wrong idea of despising manual labour. . . . Today writers write for the sake of Socialism and Communism, not for fame and remuneration. . . . '

Some days later the Writers' Union was praised for rounding up poets, novelists and essayists to make steel.

From October 1958 onwards the official Chinese press carried more and more reports indicative of the exasperation of the people with the 'big leap forward' to Communism. The communes movement—uniting several villages or entire districts into human reservoirs of agricultural and industrial labour, disrupting millions of families and separating them into men's, women's and children's quarters (married couples having a chance to spend every Saturday or every second Saturday night together)—caused general unrest and even some local

revolts. On December 10, 1958 the Chinese Centcom decided to slow down the big leap and, early in 1959, at the XXIst Congress of the Soviet CP, Khrushchev accused the Chinese leaders of damaging the building of Communism by trying to leap into Communism before economic conditions were created for this.

Whether distribution of the necessities of life according to one's labour is a bourgeois legal concept or not, whether China can reach Communism in a few years or not, are maybe not very exciting questions for Western readers. But for the millions who had to fight for the right to eight hours' sleep; for the old people doing forced labour in the 'Happy Homes' barracks for the aged; for the families of those executed because of their reluctance to make their personal leap forward; for the 140,000 students and professors sent to build dams because they doubted Mao's policies—for all these it was a great shock to learn from the infallible Khrushchev that their sufferings were in vain.

The effect of the slowing down of the big leap forward alleviated the situation of the intellectuals for some weeks. This Party resolution was not immediately published. According to the official explanation it was found prudent to 'lessen the impact of this announcement'. But soon the Tibetan revolt came and the Party apparatus was geared to another hate campaign. In its patriotic fervour, the Party apparatus became even more sensitive to the treasonable activities to which creative writing seems to lead.

Now 1959 is the second of the 'three bitter years' which, according to the Chinese Communist Party line, is necessary to build 'the happy future'. Again, officially, April 1959 was 'the love-the-people month' for public security forces throughout the country. Party HQ have as yet no directives to end 'the surrender-our-hearts [to the Party] movement'.

But according to Chinese Party announcements, government decrees and newspaper editorials, the present period is also one of the 'imbalance' stages in the dialectical process of 'balance-imbalance—new balance'. The government is fighting economic chaos caused by

maximalists and chauvinists of industrial plants, regions, professions and minorities'. The purges of army 'professionalists' resulted in the demotion to the ranks of thousands of officers above the rank of major. The trade unions are being harshly purged of officials who 'try to create the impression that workers' rights have to be defended against the Party'.

In such a situation it is not surprising that many Chinese writers were reproached in the first half of 1959 for their 'silence strike'.

* * *

NORTH KOREA

> 'Writers in particular must hold to the fact that the Party policy represents today's passion and thus fully display their talents on this basis.'

North Korea, like North Vietnam, is fortunate in having two Big Brothers: China and the USSR. In the treatment of literature and art the North Korea régime follows so closely the Chinese practice and the Chinese Party line that a detailed chronicle of events would be a simple repetition. The only novel note in North Korea is that Party resolutions and editorials demand all the time that writers should *defend* the Party Central Committee. A December 1, 1958 resolution 'stressed that writers, publishing and press workers must more solidly arm themselves with the ideology of the Party and defend at any time and at any place the Central Committee headed by Marshal Kim Il Sung'.

Two days later the writers, publishing and press workers vowed to 'strengthen the ideological indoctrination of the working people . . . and thus train the entire working people as loyal fighters under Marshal Kim Il Sung'. (Pyongyang Radio, December 3, 1958.)

Nodong Sinmun, the Party organ, summarised the Party's demands in an editorial entitled: 'For Progress of Our Party-Minded Militant Literature.' The main points of the editorial:

'Our Party is calling on them [writers] to indoctrinate the working people with Communist ideology and . . . to portray their optimism toward a victorious tomorrow. This can be done only by means of Socialist realism, by writers armed with the Marxist-Leninist view of the world. . . . The Party must fortify our writers. . . . Party organisations must have them *think, act and live the way our Party does.*

'A writer or an artist can be successful only when he relies on Party guidance and arms himself with Party policy. . . . More and more writers and artists of late are going out to factories and villages in search of protagonists for their creative work. *This is fine but not sufficient!* Our writers and artists must be more than guests and bystanders—*they must share pleasures and hardships with the workers there.* Let us rally firmly around the Central Committee headed by Marshal Kim Il Sung and march forcefully forward, upholding the banner of Socialist realism!'

Up to June 1959 there were no reports of the return of writers and artists from their voluntary excursions to share the pleasures and hardships of miners and peasants.

6

The Writers' Camps of North Vietnam

In North Vietnam the commissars, in some respects surpassing even their Chinese masters, are having a difficult time with their writers. These, in spite of the periodical decimation of their ranks by executions and imprisonment, carry on the fight. Their resistance is so stubborn that they persist in writing 'revisionist, pernicious, poisonous stuff' even during the periods of all-out counter-attack by the Party.

As in every country of the orbit, the death rate has been high not only among writers but also among their periodicals. All the periodicals were originally started directly by the Party. Two of these, the most important ones in the country, were the *Giai Pham* and the *Nhan Van*. They were suppressed and a new literary periodical was started early in 1957—*Van*, to reassert Party control in literature. After a few more or less conformist issues *Van* became 'revisionistic' and had to be banned once and for all in 1958. It was replaced by *Van Hoc*, which since then has also been criticised by the Party.

In North Vietnam—guided by the two great allies, the USSR and China—the mass-murder of class-hostile elements was on a very large scale. Poor landworkers and small peasants were labelled 'rich peasants and exploiters' and were executed by tens of thousands.

The name of the 'Vietnamese Pasternak', Vu Bao, is not known in the Western world. His novel, *Being About to Celebrate Marriage* (published in September 1957) is the story of two young lovers caught up in the rural 'errors-rectification campaign'. Attacking the novel, the official *Van Hoc* (August 15, 1958) calls it slanderous. The family of Vu Bao's heroine is described as having been

erroneously classified as landowners, which meant very serious trouble indeed for them. The article says that 'those who were erroneously classified as landowners were, of course, numerous in the land reform' but objects to the author's negative attitude:

> 'In brief, in the eyes of Vu Bao, all our organisations from top to bottom were corrupted and spoiled. He featured the scenes of unjust torture and death sentences in a most discontented tone. And while he hardly referred to our successes, he evoked the image in which the grave of a Party secretary, unjustly sentenced to death during the land reform, is lying side by side with that of a cruel and wily landowner. . . . Furthermore, the novel contains an element of political challenge regarding the problem of errors of rectification. As we all know, the Party policy is to uproot errors with their original causes. *As for what has already happened and injuries which are irremediable, nobody should still expect the Party to perform impossibilities for their reparation.*'

Vu Bao, instead of recanting, wrote: 'There are so many families still bearing injuries because there have been so many people like us who dared not, during the recent stormy time, stand up to speak in defence of justice.'

Reports after arrests of writers and various Party resolutions seem to indicate that, according to the Party, too many writers stood up for the people's rights.

The most typical attack against 'Socialist realism' was made in a strip cartoon by the writer and painter Tran Duy (*Van*, November 29, 1957). An artist is shown quietly painting a flower; in the following pictures a commissar who knows nothing of art, asks him stupid questions and insists that the painting should have a political message. The artist is ordered first to paint in a worker and, 'since workers, peasants and soldiers cannot be separated', he must add two more figures. The commissar then points out that the workers, peasants and soldiers must be supported by the 'masses' and the picture must also show that their struggle is victorious. In the final cartoon the artist throws down his palette and brushes

and looks in despair at the banners and marching figures obscuring the flower which he set out to paint.

Tran Duy is also the author of a story, *The Giants*—who level mountains, clear jungles and fill oceans regardless of the people crushed in the process. It turns out that the giants were created without hearts. The comment of the Genius of Earth in the story is: 'If you could make giants with brains and hearts, it would be perfect. But if you cannot make such giants, you should rather create small messengers, no taller-than-ordinary men, but with big hearts.' Tran Duy was arrested.

Other writers seemed to think that 'the giants' were not only heartless but were not so well equipped in brainpower either. Min Hoang, the author of *The Heap of Machinery*, depicted the ignorance and stupidity of the economic and industrial commissars. He was accused by the official *Nhan Dan* not only of individualism and arrogance but also of subversion. Min Hoang implied that the Party's programme of reconstruction was rotten and wasteful of human lives and property. He even dared 'to attack harshly the noble aid of fraternal countries'.

As Min Hoang was accused of belonging to the clique of Tran Dan (a young poet who had been very brutally treated in a re-education camp, and who disappeared for years) it is probable that this silenced author shares his fate.

From February to April, 1958 'thousands of writers, artists and cultural cadres attended struggle courses, which were closely supervised by the Party'—reported *Hoc Tap* in April 1958. 'Struggle course' is another name for the collective brainwashing campaign. Participants in these courses are 'inmates' of the Party schools. *Cuu Quoc* reported on April 27 that the writers and artists on these courses 'did not confess their crimes at once. This is nothing new.' But in the end 'they confessed about themselves, about the ringleaders and other members of the group'. The participants in the courses addressed a letter to the Centcom promising 'to participate in labour according to each one's capacity, so as to continue our personal reform'.

Confessions and self-criticisms of writers were pub-

lished in various papers, followed by articles attacking them as insincere and incomplete, demanding further confessions of real crimes. The alternation of self-criticism with vitriolic attacks is a well-known technique in the USSR (during the purge periods) and in China, where it constitutes an important part of the collective brainwashing campaign.

Some of the writers who refused to confess disappeared. Others, like Nguyen Huu Dang, Tran Thieu Bao and Thuy An, were described as top saboteurs, Trotskyites, who had 'conspired with reactionary elements . . . and with spies left behind by the imperialists'. Their arrest was reported officially. In May 1959 it was still not known whether they had been executed or not.

During April and May 1958, the campaign against certain writers (three well-known poets so far not mentioned, former editors of literary periodicals, publishers, university professors) was mounting. Almost no day passed without virulent attacks against them in the press. The usual Security Police methods were used. The newspapers published denunciations by former friends and acquaintances, readers' letters demanding their swift punishment, formal indictments and, of course, personal smears. These writers, once exposed as enemies, had to be all-round monsters, spies, Trotskyites, saboteurs, who led 'lives of debauchery'.

The brutality of the attack was intended to discourage other revisionists. These, however, still failed to recant. In July 1958 the Writers' Union expelled several leading writers who stuck to their 'erroneous literary attitudes'. The membership of certain others was suspended for three years and the Union had to administer a serious warning to 'a number of writers who have committed serious mistakes'. (*Van Hoc*, July 5, 1958.)

The expelled writers had, of course, no chance of getting into print, and editors were wary of those suspended. Yet resistance went on.

The Party had to act. It was announced officially 'that beginning on August 1, 1958 *all* cultural workers at all levels, throughout North Vietnam, will take turns in going to the countryside, to factories, mines and to army

units to do manual work'. At the beginning of 1959 it was reported by *People's Vietnam* that 'almost all the writers have divided themselves into groups and gone . . . to learn all kinds of production work'. The campaign for self-transformation through physical work was to be supervised by the Security Police.

Soon writers and artists were pictured in newspaper reports smiling happily while digging ditches, carting earth and doing other kinds of useful work. Some of the letters written by the writers themselves gave a different picture. The working day began at 5 a.m. 'My meals are meatless and consist only of bindweed and pickling-wine', one of them wrote.

After three months of forced labour there was a 're-capitulation conference'. The writers and intellectuals were still not ready to confess their crimes, so they were sent back for a further undefined period of labour since *'the Socialist seeds had not yet flourished in their hearts'*.

The writers, of course, only shared the general fate of all intellectuals. For instance, Hanoi Radio announced on November 13, 1958 that despite the acute shortage of doctors 'the second group of over 1,300 professors and students of the Hanoi Medical and Pharmaceutical College went to labour in Hai Doung province'. In September, 300 actors and actresses from the State theatres went to voluntary labour. A professor of Philosophy, Tran Duc Thao, confessed that he supplied the *Nhan Van* group of writers with French newspapers which 'distorted Hungarian affairs and slandered the Soviet Union. . . . I said that non-Stalinist democratisation will win. My intention in stressing Yugoslav and Polish Socialism was to praise their revisionist aspects which were agreeable to bourgeois ideology. . . . *I dreamed of a proletarian dictatorship assuring a kind of freedom of the sort found in France. . . .'*

The writers' greatest crime lay in their *poisoning the mind of youth*:

> 'University students were contaminated by the venom of the *Nhan Van-Giai Pham* group of writers. . . . After graduation, the students dispersed through-

out the country, retaining in their minds the venomous and reactionary ideas of these writers. The authorities in rural areas were faced with many difficulties caused by the bad influence of the group. . . . A number of schoolboys also claimed freedom in their schools.' (*Nhan Dan*, April 28–29, 1958.)

As if summing up the theme of this essay, the official Communist paper of North Vietnam wrote:

'What is noteworthy is that the manoeuvres and arguments of the *Petofi* group in Hungary, of the writers of *Po Prostu* in Poland, the rightist groups in China, the *Nhan Van-Giai Pham* group in our country, and so forth, are exactly the same.' (*Nhan Dan*, March 3, 1958.)

7
The Hidden Enemy

THIS book has surveyed, with documentation, some typical instances of the situation and behaviour of writers in the Communist world. Some countries under Communist rule have been barely mentioned. But the evidence from the USSR, China and from some of the East European and Far Eastern satellites shows a great similarity. Even on the basis of a short survey a general pattern emerges.

After a Communist seizure of power, a proportion of the writers go into exile or are promptly arrested. Some escape into less controversial occupations. The remaining majority divides into Party writers and non-Party writers. As full dictatorship is established, many writers are forced to join the Party. There are purges and indoctrination campaigns. The Writers' Unions of Communist and sympathiser writers are set up, the members approved by the régime. Yet, in five or ten years' time, one-third or even half of these writers turn against the commissars. In some countries, like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, North Vietnam, most of the writers have had to be reprimanded by the Party.

After further purges and 'rectification drives' only a very small proportion of the active writers are men and women who were writing before the régime began. The rest have been recruited from the younger generation and from the ranks of workers and peasants. Yet even against these new writers, creatures of the régime, the commissars have to start all over again with administrative measures, repression, rectification, prison and executions.

During the alternating waves of repression and relaxation, the accusations against the writers change in content. During the repression periods, the writers' main crimes, according to Party *Centcom* resolutions, were:

1. Bourgeois aestheticism ('art for art's sake' tendencies, formalism, silence strike, escape into the past, escape into non-political subjects).

2. Withdrawal from politics, non-political writing. The writers hide in their ivory towers, they write 'self-isolating' high-level stuff, consequently:

3. They are by-passed by 'history'. They are 'not contemporary with their glorious times', 'they set themselves against historical development' and so become 'isolated from the people'. 'While our glorious youth, the workers and the peasantry are enthusiastically united under the leadership of our great Party, the writers sulk on their islands of art.' The reason for all this:

4. The writers are 'ideologically weak', they do not study Marxism-Leninism, they cannot think dialectically, they do not understand the meaning of proletarian dictatorship and Communism which is the highest possible stage of human development.

These crimes are properly punished, some writers are bullied into submission, others make slight concessions to the Party line of the day, others again are silent.

In the Communist world there are six main types of writers: (1) those who are forbidden to write; (2) who dare to write; (3) who dare not to write; (4) who do not dare to write; (5) who do not dare not to write; and (6) Party functionaries pretending to be writers.

During repression periods it is mainly the last two categories who get into print, although some of those who dare to write, if they have previously acquired sufficient reputation, can manage to publish some of their works.

As all books are distributed by the State Distributing Directorate (controlled by *Agit-Prop*) the commissars soon learn the results of the repression period. The Party-approved works are bought by Party-controlled libraries, institutions and associations. The general public turns to the classics of national and world literature. The 'drabification' of literature and its regimentation into mediocrity reaches its climax at roughly the same time as the

people as a whole become so exasperated with terrorism that there are everywhere signs of unrest, resistance and even rebellion.

Relaxation or 'thaw' follows.

During the period of terrorism, writers who do get into print are not very popular with the students, workers and peasants. There are too many functionary-writers, too many frightened and fallible ones. Too many odes are written to Stalin or Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi-Minh or Rakosi. Active writers, if not despised, are pitied. The more objective members of the general public recognise the fact that under Communist régimes, writers and journalists have the most difficult and most dangerous calling. They are almost the only people who could express the stifled exasperation of the nation, its revulsion, fear, hatred and longing for freedom. As they are prohibited from doing so, their calling comes into disrepute.

During the period of relaxation this situation is changed overnight. The writers and journalists, intellectuals and university students, as the articulate minority of society, express the true feelings of the people. As a poem or short story is generally more effective than a newspaper article or a learned essay, the people feel that the writers best express their sentiments. The writers become immensely popular. Even timid little men, the prudent middle-aged or cynical veterans, are affected by this. Writers who were aptly called in the previous period 'frightened molluscs' suddenly find themselves risking their necks for the sake of a single daring poem or short story. The silenced ones—those who dared not to write and those who did not dare to write—all start to publish.

The reaction of Party headquarters in every Communist country during the thaw-period is not only similar: it is standardised and uniform. The writers are accused of a new set of crimes, and *curiously enough these are the exact opposite of their former crimes:*

1. Anti-Party political activities. Their novels, plays, short stories and poems represent a *political* attack against the régime. Those who refused in the preced-

ing period to 'notice Communist reality', now become 'vile slanderers' of this very same reality.

2. They poison the minds of youth and incite people to anti-Party sentiments. They 'pretend it is not the Party that is the defender of the true interests of workers and peasants, but they, the writers'.

3. Their 'demagogic, clever and flamboyant writings mislead the people and trick them into rallying around the writers. . . .' 'They cajole, flatter and trick the masses into counter-revolutionary movements.'

4. They pretend to understand Marxism-Leninism better than the Party. They think that they can come out with their versions of further developments of Marxism and try to impress simple Party members with their mastery of dialectical thinking. They 'fully expose themselves with the assertion that dictatorship of the proletariat is a façade for the dictatorship of the Party leaders.'

At the end of the period of relaxation, the 'self-isolated', 'aloof' and anti-political writers are the symbols and leaders of popular revolt against bureaucratic despotism. By that time poems, short stories, novels and plays have fully exposed the real situation: instead of building a better future, the commissars have transformed the people into State serfs.

The writers infect their countrymen with their doubts. They write for eyewitnesses about eyewitnesses. They show people that their life of terror and misery cannot be a basis for the future happiness of mankind. They remind the people that you cannot build a healthier and better tomorrow founded on a today of fear, distrust, mass-murder, officially encouraged denunciation campaigns, on lies and unendurable tension.

All the time it is pumped into the people and their writers that a tremendous class-war is being waged by the commissars. But they persist in feeling that the commissars are waging war only against them. With each victory over the class enemy—*their fate gets worse.* Thaw novels and thaw short stories describe the life of the industrial workers after a new decision of the Party to

raise the working-norms and reduce the real wages. And this victory over the workers is described by the Party as a victory over the class enemies. After the millions of rich peasants, the kulaks, have been killed off, the commissars start their war against those who are 'moved by a kulak spirit', against poor peasants who would like to live better.

The victory over non-conformist intellectuals, rebellious, curious and hot-headed students; over individualists; over impulsive people; over people who cling to the old type of family; who believe in the sacredness of family ties; who believe in moral principles which are independent of the class-war; people who take too much pride in their work; people who cannot change themselves into purely rational cogs in the wheel of the Party machine—the victory over all kinds and all manners of people *is always announced by the Party as a victory over the class enemy.*

Then there is the fight 'against old traditions that have persisted for thousands of years'. The fight against nationalism, patriotism, religion. The fight against 'the couples who want to build themselves oases of love, forgetting about the collective'.

There are victories over 'factologists', who prefer to believe well-attested facts instead of 'Party facts'. People are smitten down in the heroic class war for sticking to 'abstract truth, forgetting that truth is what helps the class war to victory'. There are people who think that common sense and common decency can be judged and understood by everyone, without the guidance of the commissars.

Great victories are won over people who, seeing all this, hold that the enemy against which the commissars fight is human nature itself.

* * *

In this essay, which aims at giving a 'synoptic glimpse' of the gigantic laboratory experiment of producing ordered literature, only some typical documentation has been given, and only a few general aspects of the problem touched upon. It remains for one of the most important

reasons for the failure of this experiment to be briefly indicated. There must be a basic political explanation for the ever-present nagging anxiety of the commissars when confronted with artists and writers. There must be a basic reason why the commissars wait in vain for their kind of literary genius, a genius who could fully please the Party. There must be a basic factor which makes it impossible even for convinced Communist writers to produce what the Party expects them to produce.

Apart from such general factors as the impossibility of *fully rational artistic creation* and the already discussed antinomies between writers and commissars, I feel that the basic reason for the complete subjection of literature is the *antinomy between the Party and mankind.* Only such an antinomy can explain why the Party must always regard all true art and literature as a chronic malady, as a malignantly lingering social evil.

The clue can be found in the only instance where Communist theory and practice were and are in perfect accord, in the theory and practice of class war.

After the liquidation of the obvious class enemies, the former middle and upper classes, the landowners, industrialists, bankers and merchants, proletarian dictatorship is established. The class enemy is then in the villages because the 'peasant way of life automatically breeds capitalism'. It is not enough to liquidate the rich peasants and the middle peasants, the class enemy is lurking there in the collective farms.

According to Marxism-Leninism, however, the working class on its own is unable to know its 'true interests'. The workers without proper guidance 'spontaneously develop bourgeois trade unionist ideology' which is the enemy of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The workers have to be led 'by the vanguard of the working class: the Communist Party'. But this vanguard cannot be allowed to lead because Party members and the lower organs of the Party, without proper guidance from above, are apt to start factions and to produce discord in their own ranks. 'Democratic centralism' (the ceremonial name of dictatorship over the Party members by the Party apparatus) ensures that the Party is drained of all political life, of

all discussion or debate. All questions of theory and practice are categorically decided by the central leadership, be it called Politbureau or Party Presidium. But class enemies are regularly found even in this august body, in the vanguard of the vanguard of the proletariat. Every member of the presidium is a potential (and very often an actual) class enemy.

Peasants, workers, intellectuals, Party members and presidium members are by definition, in theory and practice, potential class enemies. The enemy is everyone who is not a willing tool of the dictator on the top.

The class against which the Communist dictator fights is the human race.

And writers and artists cannot be used in this struggle. They cannot agree with the commissars on the nature and purpose of Man. Their pitiful meanderings and heroic struggles show that mankind intends to stay human.

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The Author

George Paloczi-Horvath, a Hungarian writer and journalist, describes himself as "belonging to the world fraternity of exiles and prison-graduates". The liberal daily newspaper of which he was foreign editor was banned by the pro-Hitler Hungarian government at the beginning of the war and he had to escape to allied territory.

In 1947 he returned to Hungary and in 1949 he was arrested by the Communist secret police. After more than five years in jail, he was banned from writing and started to write only during the pre-revolutionary ferment in 1956, of which he became one of the leading figures. He wrote the leading article of the revolutionary *Literary Gazette.*

After the crushing of the revolution he escaped to the West and lives now in London. He is the author of several novels, historical works and books on current affairs. His latest book, *The Undefeated,* won the Atlantic Prize for 1959.

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